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Rippon plays role of rock star in breakthrough year

U.S. champion soared to new heights, ignited crowds throughout season

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Adam Rippon heard roars of approval from skating audiences all season long in 2015-16. -Getty Images

Icenetwork will announce its choice for 2015-16 Person of the Year later this month. Here's one of the nominations for that honor from icenetwork contributor Lois Elfman.

"How does it feel to be [Adam Rippon](#) this year?" asked a reporter of the U.S. men's champion after his free skate at the 2016 Team Challenge Cup. Answer: It feels pretty good.

While Rippon certainly had some stellar moments in the years since he entered the senior ranks, they hadn't matched the highs of the two world junior titles he won back to back, in 2008 and '09. But last year, Rippon vaulted back onto the U.S. podium with a mesmerizing free skate at the 2015 U.S. Championships in Greensboro, showing once again his potential for greatness.

This season, he took it a step further by delivering an energized, electric and, most important, golden free skate at the U.S. championships in Saint Paul that brought him his first U.S. senior title. He followed that up with strong, charismatic performances at the world championships in Boston that garnered him standing ovations for both his short program and free skate.

"At worlds, I felt such support from everyone in the audience," Rippon said. "I felt like I was at a rock concert when they announced my name. I just wanted to channel that energy that was being put in to support and help me keep pushing forward. I kept imagining that I was going to have a standing ovation.

"[The standing ovations] felt like a culmination of all of these hard times coming together -- the good days and the bad days and pushing through," he added. "It all flashes before your eyes when you're standing in that moment after your performance. It's very satisfying."

For skating like a rock star -- his music was, after all, Queen for the short program and the Beatles for the free skate -- and capturing some perfect moments, Adam Rippon is my pick for Person of the Year. His performances left indelible impressions -- the kind skaters dream of in their careers, and the kind skating fans, and even jaded journalists, treasure.

In a way, Rippon's breakthrough began with his free skate in Greensboro, a performance that was deemed the best of the event. The skates he put out this year validated that exquisite moment and reflected a newfound confidence borne of tireless hard work. For Rippon, this season was the first time he consistently believed in what he was doing, and it showed. Whether it was coming out or dying his hair outrageous new colors, he was truly living out loud, and we were mesmerized.

"It was a big growing year because I did my best to stay true to the process and I didn't lose faith," Rippon said.

For years, he dreamed of having a busy schedule when he wasn't competing; after winning the U.S. title in January, his calendar started to fill up. He was a bit overwhelmed by his newfound popularity at first, but he ultimately embraced it, knowing he deserved every bit of the success he'd attained.

Joining the cast of *Stars on Ice* was absolute wish fulfillment -- from the 12-hour rehearsals for the group numbers to the Jef Billings costumes to the cubby for his skate guards with his name on it.

"That was probably the moment that it felt the most surreal, when we did the cast photo shoot and when I got my own cubby," Rippon said. "It's something I've always wanted to be a part of, and it's really happening. It's amazing."

After *Stars on Ice*, he'll return to Los Angeles and begin work on his programs for next season before taking a short staycation break. In keeping with his rock star image, he'll decide on what hair color he'll showcase next.

"I have full faith in my hairdresser," he said. "I think we'll come up with something good."

The skating world is eager to see what's next.



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