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Rippon talks Kim, Olympics and Four C's win

The Inside Edge with Sarah and Drew

By Sarah S. Brannen and Drew Meekins, special to icenetwork.com

(02/20/2010) - Adam Rippon talks about Four Continents, the Olympic men's competition, and training partner Yu-Na Kim.

Adam's gold

No sooner had the men's event ended than we start looking ahead to the next four years. Many of today's big stars will be retiring, and already we can see that we'll be talking about Takahiko Kozuka, Florent Amodio, Denis Ten, Michal Brezina and of course Patrick Chan in the buildup to Sochi in 2014.

America's biggest young rising star is probably 20-year-old Adam Rippon. His gold medal at the Four Continents Championship in Korea three weeks ago went nearly unremarked by the media as they focused on the upcoming Winter Olympic Games.

Adam trains at the Toronto Cricket Club with Brian Orser, sharing daily training time with next week's gold-medal favorite in the ladies competition, Yu-Na Kim. Adam finished fourth at the U.S. Championships last month, and was on a plane to Toronto early the next morning with only days to train before he headed to Korea.

"It was so hard," said Adam. "But I felt like I needed to redeem myself after not skating my best at nationals. I went home Monday morning. I opened up my suitcase, put everything away, and thought, 'OK, go to sleep and pretend it's a week after nationals.' The next day I was on the ice but I was so exhausted."

He left for Korea the next Sunday and noted that it was a very different experience to visit that country without Yu-Na Kim. He called her when he got there.

"I said, 'Yu-Na, going to Korea without you is so much easier!' When I was in Jeonjun I was recognized pretty often, it's a pretty small place, but in Seoul I felt so free."

The time change is always a challenge, of course.

"I didn't sleep very well on the plane, so I was like, 'Adam, you can't sleep all five hours on the bus or you won't sleep tonight,' but it didn't work and I passed out within five minutes. We got to the hotel and I'm still dead asleep on the bus, and everyone was trying to wake me up. Kaitlyn Weaver was hitting me and violently shaking me, and Andrew Poje was shaking me, but finally everyone laughing at me woke me up."

Adam said his practices were pretty normal, although he was working with assistant coach Ghislain Briand instead of Brian Orser.

"It was the first time since being with Brian that he hadn't been able to come to a competition with me," said Adam. "Brian had been in Spokane for two weeks, with me and Christine Gao. It wouldn't be fair to Yu-Na if she had to go three weeks without him before the Olympics."



Adam Rippon enjoys training with superstar Yu-Na Kim in Toronto. (Getty Images)

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In the six-minute warm-up for the short program, Adam didn't feel like his legs were under him, and the program didn't go well. "I stepped out of the Axel and I stepped out of the triple Lutz and it was downgraded," he said. "I felt like my legs were Jello-y, but I've done good programs before when I felt like that. I kept telling myself to relax, but I should have been fighting instead."

At the end of the short program, Kevin Reynolds led with 81.60 points. He had landed a quad Salchow-triple toe combination and with his nearest competitor almost ten points behind, he looked unbeatable.

Adam emailed Brian Orser, who told him that although he was over 12 points behind the leader, it wasn't an unrealistic leap to make. He said, "You have nothing to lose. There's no reason why you shouldn't do a great long program."

Adam came up with a new strategy to motivate himself for the free skate.

"I tried to think of those times when people come to visit and suddenly I can do everything perfect because I want to show off. So I decided not to fight for everything, but to go out there and impress everybody."

It worked, and Adam skated a brilliant program with two triple Axels and two triple Lutzes, including his trademark "Rippon Lutz," done with both arms over his head. He scored 156.22 points for a total of 225.78.

"It was one of those programs where I was very in the moment," he said. "I knew exactly what I was doing and in the final spin I told myself, 'Don't go crazy pumping your fists.' And then that was exactly what I did. I couldn't stop myself!"

With eight more skaters left to compete, though, he was in for a long wait to learn his final placement. He went backstage, but the only monitor on which he could watch the competition was right by the skaters' entrance. He didn't want to distract people who still had to skate.

"I went outside," he said. "I texted Brian 'I skated clean, I'm just waiting for the marks to come up, I feel like I finally did a strong program and I'm relieved.' I started getting emails, and then I went inside and only two skaters had gone."

Adam found a lounge with a monitor, but found it too difficult to watch his competitors. He spent the rest of the competition walking around, going outside, coming back, in, until finally his coach told him he had won.

"So, I got back into my costume and my skates and got the medal and it was a great feeling," he said. "And to have it in Korea where I had done the shows with Yu-Na -- I felt like I had a lot of fans there, including some fans from Seoul who had come to the cricket club last summer to watch me, and I felt at home."

Adam has actually learned to speak some Korean. "Every time I say anything it's in this really heavy accent," he admitted. "I feel like I'm the Borat of speaking Korean. I can read it pretty well. I asked Yu-Na to teach me a few sentences to fake it. If somebody asks me a certain question I can answer in Korean and I feel so smart when I do it."

Ryan Bradley, by the way, landed two quads in his free skate but once again came up just short of a medal.

"It's almost unreal for me to be in the same competition as Ryan," said Adam. "When I first started skating, my coach would make me watch a video every day of a competition Ryan was in. And I was like, if I ever meet him I'm gonna kill him! I had to watch his "William Tell Overture" long program over and over and over."

Adam and Yu-Na

Adam and Yu-Na talked regularly while he was competing in her home country. "She was sending me good luck and stuff like that," he said. "She has Korean TV in Toronto so she could watch Four Continents. We've become close friends and it's really nice to have somebody who's training with you at a high level."

Adam told us that Yu-Na skipped the opening ceremonies in Vancouver in favor of staying in Toronto and training.

"For her, it's not about the experience of going to the Olympics, it's about going and doing your job. I think it's smart the way she's approaching the competition. As much as possible, it will be like a normal competition. She'll go a few days before her event so the pacing will be something she's very used to. Some familiarity is important."

We asked if Adam would go to Vancouver to cheer on his friend.

"I'm going to be a mess watching on TV," he said. "I'd die if I went there and watched! I'd be so nervous! In Paris [at the 2009 Trophée Bompard] I watched her and it was really tough. My mom was trying to ask me questions and I was so nervous I just said 'Yes' to everything. I couldn't move."

"When you see somebody every day you see their ups and their downs and you know what nobody else knows about their training process. As a fellow skater I know how hard she works, but as a friend I want her to do her best so badly. I hope she just does what she's been doing in practice, knock on wood. I don't want to make predictions."

Adam on the men's short program

We checked in with Adam the day after the men's short program to re-hash the event thoroughly.

"I think it lived up to being as dramatic as everyone said. It was so exciting," said Adam. "Poor Brian Joubert! I thought, all he has to do is the Lutz/toe and he'll be fine, and then he fell and I was 'Argh, Brian, I've so totally been there.' Even before he toed in, I feel like he was already thinking about having enough speed for the toe. It was at a weird angle. He was thinking and he shouldn't have been."

"I think it was one of the best performances that Johnny [Weir] has ever done. He gave it 100% for sure. Evan [Lysacek] was in a zone, completely. I think it was the best Axel he's ever done. It was incredible. The footwork was great, and I loved every second of his program. I felt so bad for Jeremy [Abbott]. He wanted it so badly. If he had skated like he did at nationals he would have been in the 89 - 92 range."

"Daisuke [Takahashi] was so good. He was so rough with the choreography, and then he melted. I loved his program. I hope he can keep it together for the long."

"Oh and Stéphane [Lambiel], oh my god, he's one of my favorite skaters of all time. I wish he didn't have to do jumps, because with his spins and his skating, I could just watch him for a 20-minute program. He skates so differently from everyone else. "I watched the men by myself. I was so worked up. This morning I felt like I had skated all thirty short programs. I was exhausted."

After the free skate

We called Adam on Friday night to talk over the final results. Adam, being in Canada, was able to watch the compulsory dances live.

"Thirty tangos," he said, exaggerating. "Fun!"

But what did he think of the men's final results?

"Oh, my god, I'm so happy," said Adam. "Not to take anything away from Plushenko, because the way he got right back to the top of his sport, it's incredible that he got back into shape. But to see how Evan's program compared to Plushenko's... it had more polish and it had the transitions and the interpretation."

What about the whole quad "controversy?"

"You remember how everybody skated in Torino?" said Adam. "Everybody tried the quad, and everybody fell a million times. And now they're doing it less but they're getting used to the rhythm of the programs. It will get easier for people my age to add a quad back in."

Adam was a bundle of nerves as he watched the broadcast.

"I thought, 'OK, this is going to be so close,' and I didn't know what was going to happen. Plushenko skated and I couldn't sit down. I was pacing back and forth and ducking in the corner, saying 'Oh my god oh my god oh my god.' And I see Plushenko's face and I'm like, 'Oh no he won,' and then I see Evan won and I fist-pumped, screamed... it all happened."

"What a competition! That was one of the best things I've ever watched. It was so good!"

Red Mittens

A huge, warm-handed "Thank you" to our new friend in Canada, Heather, who not only got us a pair of those awesome red Olympic mittens, but tried to explain curling to us.

What a week! And it's only half over!

Sarah and Drew

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