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Minnesota morsels: Mature Rippon gutsy but smart

Chen decides jump layout at 11th hour; Experience 'surreal' for Carly Gold

Posted 1/22/16 by Lynn Rutherford and Amy Rosewater, special to icenetwork



Adam Rippon says he will include the quad lutz in only the free skate in Saint Paul. -Getty Images

[Adam Rippon](#) is checking his ego at the Xcel Center Energy door -- in more ways than one.

Last season, Rippon performed the highest-scoring free skate ever at a U.S. championships and won the silver medal. But when NBC TV crews visited his rink in Artesia, California, to film interviews for preview shows, they bypassed him with a quick hello and moved on to training partners Ashley Wagner and [Nathan Chen](#).

In his younger days, the slight might have hurt Rippon. But at age 26, with a decade of international competition behind him, it's just one more reason to skate lights out in Saint Paul.

"It's been two years in a row where they've done two skaters in the same rink where I'm at, and they don't ask (me) to do anything," Rippon said. "I've been around for a while, and pretty often I've been overlooked. Before, I would take it as people don't believe in me. Now I'm taking a new approach: I'm going to show them they messed up, that they should have contacted me. I don't take personal offense to it, but I have to use it as motivation."

The popular Rippon, who had a pair of fourth-place finishes in this season's Grand Prix Series, has also put his ego aside when it comes to his jump strategy. Last season, he vowed to land quadruple lutz in both his short program and free skate, and he included the jump in his short programs at Skate Canada and Rostelecom Cup. This time around, he's saving it for the free skate.

"I looked at my protocols a year ago at nationals," Rippon said. "I did a nice attempt -- it was under-rotated -- but I was really happy with my skate, and at the end of the night, I found myself in fifth place. I had to take that into consideration, more than wanting to be gutsy. Heading into these championships, I needed to show I was smart and gutsy."

Rippon wants the quad lutz so badly that it took short program deductions in a few more competitions to convince him to change his strategy.

"If I had done a clean program with all triples at Skate Canada, I probably would have won the short program," he said. "A clean short in Russia (Rostelecom), I most likely would have been second overall. A clean short at nationals most likely would have won (me) the title last year. So I had to put my ego in check about what I wanted to put out there."

China's Boyang Jin has made the quad lutz, worth 13.6 points, his signature this season, landing it at several competitions, including the Grand Prix Final. Rippon hopes to join the club Sunday during his free skate to a Beatles medley.

"I have all the jump boxes filled, and my only option is to do a quad lutz or a double axel," he said. "I've trained that first section of the free over and over, so whether I land the lutz or have an issue on it, I can right away put it out of my mind and just continue with the program."

- Lynn Rutherford

Chen prepares for possible double duty

When an NBC researcher asked Chen to list which jumps he will do in his short program and free skate here, there was no simple answer. The 16-year-old, who won the Junior Grand Prix Final last month, could include one or two quads in his short, and two or three in his free. He and coach Rafael Arutunian won't make up their minds until the day of the event.

"Usually my toe is fairly there most of the time; there are no real issues as long as I'm not hurting," Chen said. "My salchow is here and there; it just depends on how I feel before. I have a bunch of different variations of my programs that I've put together in my head and I've tried out on the ice, so whatever I feel that day is what I'll do."

That could include a quad toe-triple toe, quad salchow and triple axel in the short Friday -- or a quad toe, triple axel and triple lutz-triple toe.

"We always decide before competition; it depends on the practice," Arutunian said. "There's always competition between several guys, and we will see how it goes with the other ones. The decision will be made right before."

Chen, eighth in the U.S. last year, is enjoying a season of relative good health following a few tough years. He's no longer the diminutive skater of years past, having grown to about 5-foot-7 or so.

"Since 2014, I've probably grown about two heads, I think, which is quite a lot in two years," he said. "In terms of my jumps, I didn't feel much difference, but all of the injuries I've had over the past two years -- my knee, my shoulder, my foot, my hip -- they are all the same issues with the growth plate. It was really annoying."

Chen isn't out of the woods. He's still growing, and his hip still gives him trouble, although he thinks he can manage it here.

"I had enough time coming (home) from the Final to recoup and get back into things," he said.

Chen, along with Rippon, Wagner and Hannah Miller, traveled with Arutunian to train at the Colorado Springs World Arena before the [2016 U.S. Figure Skating Championships](#). Unlike his training partners, Chen spent just a week there before going to New Jersey to polish his free skate, set to Camille Saint-Saëns' "Symphony No. 3," with choreographer Nikoli Morozov.

"We fixed some arms, fixed some of my edges, made sure all of my element levels were there," Chen said.

"He's looking very good," Arutunian said. "I'm waiting for a good result and a surprise."

Should Chen place in the top three in the men's event, he will likely be considered for the 2016 World Figure Skating Championships in Boston, March 28-April 3. He would also be on track for the 2016 World Junior Figure Skating Championships in Hungary, March 14-20. Chen placed fourth at junior worlds last season and won bronze there in 2014.

"I've talked to Mitch [Moyer] (senior director for athlete high performance) from USFS, and he said it's possible they would send me to both junior worlds and senior worlds, if everything goes to plan," Chen said. "We'll figure that out after this competition and see how I am physically and how everything is before junior worlds. But I think the plan would be to finish my junior career by going to junior worlds and then going off from there."

- Lynn Rutherford

Gold-en girls

Almost exactly 2 1/2 hours before Gracie Gold stepped out on the ice to skate her short program Thursday night, her twin sister, Carly, made her U.S. championships debut -- and she enjoyed every minute of it.

Carly started out well, landing her double axel and triple salchow-double loop combination, but she popped her planned triple loop. She scored 42.41 points, putting her in 15th place.

"I had so much fun out there competing," Carly said. "When I hit the combo, I think I got a little ahead of myself. This has been the most surreal experience, and it's gone by so quickly. I've been dreaming of competing at nationals for so long. The only thing going through my mind right now are exclamation points."

Because of the big time delay between the sisters' skating times, Gracie was at the hotel and not in the rink for Carly's skate.

But she definitely was tuned in.

"She was texting me," Carly said. "She was watching on icenetwork."

The Gold sisters look alike and share some mannerisms, but Carly's hair is red and Gracie's is blond. Their voices, however, are so similar that Carly said some skaters thought she was Gracie when she was talking in the locker room.

"But I love it when people tell me I look like Gracie," Carly said. "I'm like, 'Thank you so much!'"

- Amy Rosewater

In Saint Paul in spirit

[Mariah Bell](#), who trains with 2015 U.S. champion Jason Brown and senior competitor Jordan Moeller in Monument, Colorado, is sad that she doesn't have her training mates with her in Saint Paul. Brown

withdrew with a strained back, and Moeller is sidelined with a broken leg.

But they are here with her in spirit. Brown and Moeller each took some crystals from their costumes and placed them on Bell's short program and free skate dresses.

"It's tough to be here without them," said Bell, who is in sixth place entering the free skate. "I feel like they are here, though."

- *Amy Rosewater*

Movin' on up

Francesca Chiera, competing in her third U.S. championships, was especially pleased with her clean short program, which put her in eighth place with 57.94 points, her highest score of the season. In 2014, she placed 17th, and she was 16th in 2015.

"I felt calm and collected," said Chiera, who trains in Coral Springs, Florida. "It felt amazing. I finally went out there and did it. It felt fun and exciting."

Chiera's routine featured a triple flip-double toe, which she hopes will become a triple-triple.

"It's on the way," she said. "It's not all the way, but it's coming."

- *Amy Rosewater*

Number crunching

Polina Edmunds' first-place score of 70.19 was not only her personal best -- it marked the fourth-highest short program score at a U.S. Figure Skating qualifying event. (Gracie Gold's score of 72.12 in 2014 is the highest.) Edmunds' previous high was 66.75, which came in 2014, the year she qualified for the U.S. Olympic team. Edmunds' best international short program score is 65.29, that coming at the 2015 Rostelecom Cup.

- *Amy Rosewater*



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