



# WORLD FIGURE SKATING CHAMPIONSHIPS BOSTON



## A world of story lines at Garden

By KAT HASENAUER CORNETTA

The international figure skating community is in Boston this week for the world championships that begin today at the Garden. While the American skaters aren't considered favorites in the premier men's or women's divisions, here's a look at what to watch before the medals are bestowed:

► **Maia and Alex Shibutani:** The popular sibling ice dancers have everything going for them heading into worlds. In January, they finally broke through and won their first U.S. senior title, then followed that up with a Four Continents title. They enter the Garden this week looking for their first worlds medal since their 2011 senior debut, and will use the power of a somewhat-hometown crowd (Alex was born here while his parents were students at Harvard) to snag another.

## AMERICAN HOPES

► **Madison Chock and Evan Bates:** The Garden was the site of a substantial career move for the ice dancers from Michigan — a silver medal at 2014 nationals and their first Olympic nod — and they will be looking for the venue to give them another boost. Last year's worlds silver medalists have had a good season, and provide steadiness and consistency. They never can be counted out, especially given Bates' skill and many years of experience (he's been to two Olympics and five world championships).

► **Alexa Scimeca and Chris Knierim:**

Bringing Metallica to the pairs short program, the Colorado-trained couple could make one of the biggest moves of any U.S. skaters this week. In the midst of a career season, complete with five international medals, they surprisingly faltered at nationals, finishing second. But the tenacious duo will be out for blood this week, with the aggressiveness and showmanship to match. They have already wowed in early practices.



## REPLACEMENT PLAYERS

Injuries struck U.S. team members Nathan Chen and Polina Edmunds, sending men's skater Grant Hochstein and ladies skater Mirai Nagasu to Boston. Both aren't your normal substitutes. Nagasu arguably has been one of the most successful U.S. skaters internationally this season, most recently taking the silver at the Four Continents Championships. She finished three spots ahead of defending U.S. champion Gracie Gold there. Hochstein finished fourth at both of his Grand Prix events in the fall and had a career-best fourth-place finish at nationals. Both are capable of outperforming their teammates who were named outright to the team.

## QUITE A PAIR

Russia's 2014 Olympic gold medalists, Tatiana Volosozhar and Maxim Trankov, have returned to competition after missing the 2014-15 season due to Trankov's shoulder surgery. They picked up where they left off, winning every competition they have entered this season. But they aren't alone. Five-time world champion and 2014 Olympic bronze medalist Aliona Savchenko of Germany is back after a year's absence and teamed with Bruno Massot. They finished just behind Volosozhar and Trankov at last month's Europeans. Both pairs look to unseat last year's title holders, Meagan Duhamel and Eric Radford of Canada.

## MAN, OH MAN!

World records have been falling right and left this season in the men's competition, with multiple quadruple jumps the norm among the top men. But what has also raised the bar has been the fact that two of the world's top skaters, 2015 world champion Jaiver Fernandez of Spain and Yuzuru Hanyu of Japan, combine difficult quad jumps with high performance ability and other strong elements. In the past, such a combination was considered rare. Add into the mix Canada's Patrick Chan, back after a year away, who has been delivering high scoring free skates all season, and you have a men's event for the ages.

## POWER STRUGGLE: JAPAN VS. RUSSIA

This worlds looks like the latest round in what has become ladies figure skating's fiercest rivalry — the Japanese vs. the Russians. Although last year's worlds champion Elizaveta Tuktamishcheva was left off the Russian team due to poor performances, the country still is sending a team capable of winning the whole shebang, including last year's World Junior and this year's Grand Prix final champion Evgenia Medvedeva. But Japan's Satoko Miyahara has followed up last year's worlds silver with a career season, and her calm skating could delight both the crowd and the judges for her first title.

## LET'S DANCE

Reigning world dance champions Gabriella Papadakis and Guillaume Cizeron of France missed the early portion of the season due to Papadakis' concussion. They bounced back to win last month's European Championships, but find themselves slowed by another injury headed into this week's event. Healthy or not, they must contend with two U.S. teams at the top of their game — last year's world silver medalists Madison Chock and Evan Bates and current national champions Maia and Alex Shibutani. And don't forget Canadians Kaitlyn Weaver and Andrew Poje, who won bronze last year and silver in 2014. Unlike the ice dance competitions of 20 years ago, where results could seem predetermined, this year's ice dance event is wide open.



## TODAY'S SCHEDULE

**10:45 a.m.:** Dance short program (live on NBCSN, noon)

► Marks the first time reigning world champions Gabriella Papadakis and Guillaume Cizeron will meet their U.S. and Canadian foes this season. Fans are eager to see how they stack up against the North Americans.

► The battle between the two best dance teams in the U.S. will write another chapter. Which will come out on top? The elegant waltz of Madison Chock and Evan Bates or the Coppelia-inspired take of Maia and Alex Shibutani?

**5 p.m.:** Opening ceremony  
**6:15 p.m.:** Men's short program (tape, NBCSN, midnight)

► With a few of the men able to post free skate scores of 200-plus, a poor short program outing might not be the death knell it used to be.

► Japan's Yuzuru Hanyu has skated to world-record scores in the short program twice this season. Can he do so again in here in Boston?

► Will the U.S. men deliver on home ice? New U.S. champion Adam Rippon will need a score several points higher than his international best of 82.25 to hang with the top men, but given the high he is coming into the event on, he definitely could make the leap.

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