

ISU ADULT FIGURE SKATING COMPETITION 2011 - A SKATER'S PERSPECTIVE

By Donald Murray

Cathy MacLean (Edmonton) summed it up well when she observed that we all want our fellow skaters to do their best. It is what we want for ourselves as well. What makes this event different and what keeps us coming back to the ISU Adult Figure Skating Competition in Oberstdorf is the addictive thrill of trying to become better, as well as the true joy of watching skaters at every skill level, create moments to really glow with magnificence.

Of course there are some who arrive in Oberstdorf with justifiable expectations. Winning for them, such as the exquisitely precise Stephane Vachon (Montreal), and the imperturbable Irina (Finland), is often quite deserved. Perhaps a few more of us though arrive each year with hopes, not knowing who might form the competition and not certain whether age or injury might play a part in what happens to us, and our companions, when we step on the ice. We all arrive with two things in mind – a desire to skate as well as we can, and to be immersed in the company of hundreds of skaters who love this sport as much as we do ourselves.

In this environment we can be simultaneously inspired watching Joan Cheng (Toronto) skate first in her group, and maintain top marks as twenty-two other skaters from around the world unsuccessfully try to better her score; while at the same time be crumpled with Dawn (America) when she has the skills to challenge Joan, yet inexplicably falls on a routine lutz that all of us have seen her land solidly all week. We are all engaged with the dash of Geoff Squires and Diana Barkley (Vancouver) as they challenge themselves to compete for the first time at the Masters Level in Free Dance, knowing that they will still enjoy watching (with the rest of us) the perennially magical dance touches of Aust and Fassbender (Berlin). This year too there was the pre-competition embrace between Jan Calnan (Ottawa), and Midori Ito (Japan) before Midori enchanted us with delicacy, and Jan pumped us full of joy by jumping eagerly into her own moment.

Many moments like these happen often over the course of the four-day competition. The successes are indeed precious. "Success" can carry skaters to the top of the podium like the clearly dominant Sonia Gougeon (Montreal) in Masters Ladies II, and the delicate Julie Fortier and Stephen Allard (Laval) in Gold Dance. It may locate them in the midst of their fellow competitors, offering a temptation to return, to score better: like first-timers Shannon Ross (Eastern Passage) and Sara Davidson (Ottawa), as well as determined veterans like Catherine Taylor (Calgary), Sandra (France), and Thomas (Germany). Success was also seen in things as simple as Natalja (Russia) grittily overcoming her knee-brace for that one moment during the pair competition when she needed to land the toe-loop that had bedeviled her all week in practice. For others, success is such a personal idea that the opportunity of skating here is enough - the rules, and placement, are entirely meaningless for them, even though they remain fascinating skaters.