

SPORTS

FIGURE SKATING

Sui, Han soar close to perfection

Chinese pair wins world gold in stunning style

By XINHUA

China's Sui Wenjing and Han Cong were in sensational form as they claimed the pairs gold medal at the ISU Figure Skating World Championships in Saitama, Japan, on Thursday.

Skating to Ezio Bosso's *Rain in Your Black Eyes*, the Chinese duo delivered a near-perfect performance, completing a triple toe-double toe-double toe combination, triple twist, triple Salchow, throw triple flip and throw triple Salchow, as well as level-four lifts.

They earned 155.60 points for the free skate to move up from second with a season-best total of 234.84 to nail down their second world title.

"It's a magic day for us," said Han. "It's wonderful to be back on top of the world. I enjoyed the free program so much that I wanted to perform more. I wish the season could continue, but it is over, so we will start preparing for next season."

Overnight leaders Evgenia Tarasova and Vladimir Morozov of Russia, who placed fourth at the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics, picked up 147.26 points and slipped to second with a total of 228.47. Another Russian pair, Natalia Zabiako and Alexander Enbert, took the bronze with 217.98.

China's Peng Cheng and Jin Yang were fourth, with 215.84 points.

The victory capped a comeback season for Sui and Han. After winning a silver at the Pyeongchang Games, Sui injured her foot and was sidelined for most of the remainder of last year.

They missed the 2018 worlds as well as the Grand Prix series before returning to international competition at this year's Four Continents



China's Sui Wenjing and Han Cong in action during Thursday's pairs free skate at the ISU world championships in Saitama, Japan. ISSEI KATO / REUTERS

Final results from pairs competition

Free skate

1. Sui Wenjing/Han Cong, China, 155.60 points
2. Evgenia Tarasova/Vladimir Morozov, Russia, 147.26
3. Vanessa James/Morgan Cipres, France, 146.52
4. Natalia Zabiako/Alexander Enbert, Russia, 144.02
5. Peng Cheng/Jin Yang, China, 140.33
6. Aleksandra Boikova/Dmitrii Kozlovskii, Russia, 140.31

Overall

1. Sui Wenjing/Han Cong, China, 234.84
2. Evgenia Tarasova/Vladimir Morozov, Russia, 228.47
3. Natalia Zabiako/Alexander Enbert, Russia, 217.98
4. Peng Cheng/Jin Yang, China, 215.84
5. Vanessa James/Morgan Cipres, France, 215.19
6. Aleksandra Boikova/Dmitrii Kozlovskii, Russia, 210.30

championships, where they took the title by a mere 0.06 points.

"We are very happy to have shown our best performance and to win this championship," said Sui. "We are better than we were at the Four Continents."

"We had a tough time this season. We could not prepare so well and did not have much time to practice. Our coaches and our team gave us a lot of support and we knew we could

make it and get the title.

"Winning the second time was harder. It really was a team effort."

"I am so happy that we performed our best today. I remember the last time we skated two clean programs at the worlds was in Shanghai in 2015."

Meanwhile, Peng and Jin improved a lot this season in both their jumps and exhibition. They turned in a clean program to *La Vie*

en Rose, but still dropped from third to fourth place.

"It's a little sad we didn't get a medal, but we did our best," said Peng.

Reigning European champions Vanessa James and Morgan Cipres of France rallied back from a disappointing short program, coming third in the free skating and pulling up from seventh to fifth with 215.19 points.

BASKETBALL

Team China's time to shine in Vegas

By SUN XIAOCHEN

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Team China is embracing the NBA Summer League in Las Vegas as a valuable test ahead of hosting the FIBA World Cup.

The Chinese Basketball Association and NBA jointly announced on Thursday that the Chinese national team will join all 30 NBA teams and the Croatia national squad in the NBA Summer League 2019, marking the first time the tournament-style competition will feature two international entrants.

The 15th edition of the summer league tips off on July 5, with the 32 teams each playing four preliminary games at the Thomas & Mack Center and Cox Pavilion at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas.

The top eight teams advance to a single-elimination round, with the championship game on July 15.

Teams failing to qualify for the final eight will each play an extra consolation game.

The high-intensity schedule fits perfectly with Team China's preparation for the Aug 31-Sept 15 World Cup, said head coach Li Nan.

"This is not something like an exhibition ... this is real combat that determines those guys' future in the NBA. They are coming for real, which for us is a great opportunity to gel, gain experience and improve," said Li, a sharpshooter on China's team at the 2008 Olympics.

This will be the second time Team China participates in the summer league, following its 2007 debut ahead of the 2008 Beijing Games.

Li, who was on that 2007 summer league roster, said it's an ideal test for his players in real competition because they will need at least a month of recovery after the CBA

season wraps up in mid-May.

"Any time you face NBA-level teams is a great opportunity to learn and improve. We will try to figure out how we can be competitive in the summer league while trying to build chemistry on a roster merged from two lineups," he said.

In the summer of 2017 the Chinese national program launched a dual-team experiment initiated by CBA chairman Yao Ming.

The large pool of players was split into two lineups — Red and Blue — with independent coaches, aimed at doubling the opportunities for homegrown talent at international level.

After alternately representing China at the World Cup qualifiers and the 2018 Asian Games, the two squads merged last September.

Li was handed the reins to lead the host at the World Cup, which will be played in eight Chinese cities.

Drawn in Group A with Cote d'Ivoire, Poland and Venezuela, Team China aims to earn direct qualification for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics through the 32-team FIBA tournament by either advancing to the quarterfinals or finishing as the highest-ranked Asian squad.

Last year, the NBA summer league set a record for total attendance (139,972) and matched its single-day attendance record (7,500), which was established in 2017.

The Portland Trail Blazers defeated the Los Angeles Lakers 91-73 in the championship game.

ESPN and NBA TV combined to amass 30.4 million viewing hours as fans across social media platforms accounted for more than 565 million video views — an increase of 35 percent over 2017.

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