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## Chen chases away junior men with record short

Ma overcomes broken blade to claim second; Vrdoljak takes third

Posted 1/7/14 by Barb Reichert, special to icenetwork



*Nathan Chen could not have skated his 'Four Seasons' short program any better than he did, landing all his jumps cleanly and receiving Level 4's for his spins and step sequence. His score of 79.61 leads the field by more than 16 points. -Jay Adef*

A record-shattering performance helped [Nathan Chen](#) turn back his young clock Tuesday night during the junior men's competition at the [2014 Prudential U.S. Figure Skating Championships](#).

Showing off a triple Axel and triple Lutz-triple toe combination was only half the show, as he amassed 79.61 points, destroying the previous junior men's record by 10 points. His brilliant spins and sharp footwork outshined the other junior men to give him a 16.15-point lead going into Thursday's free skate, which moves from the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center to the 17,500-seat TD Garden.

"This is hard work," Chen said with sweat rolling down his face. "I work my butt off at home."

Sitting in a distant second place is Jimmy Ma of the Skating Club of New York with 63.46 points, followed by Nicholas Vrdoljak of DuPage FSC (63.44) and Chase Belmontes of the Broadmoor SC (61.07).

Chen, who claimed the 2012 U.S. junior crown at age 12, is the defending bronze medalist at this event, but this year's competition is much different than the last. This year, three opponents are out of Chen's way: 2013 junior champion Vincent Zhou and silver medalist Shotaro Omori moved up to senior but are not competing due to injury. And the third opponent? A wicked stomach virus that in 2013 dropped Chen to his knees.

"Last year was pretty harsh," said Chen, a member of the Salt Lake Figure Skating Club. "I had a few minor injuries coming in and considered not [competing]. Then I got the stomach flu."

Skating his short program to *The Four Seasons* by Vivaldi, Chen electrified the crowd with four effortless triple jumps and superior spins.

Chen, who trains under coach Rafael Arutunian in Artesia, Calif., said he has grown as a skater in part to his new training mates, two-time ladies champion Ashley Wagner and Adam Rippon. The senior skaters are vying for spots on the 2014 Olympic team.

"They are a super-good inspiration," Chen said. "They are great training partners."

What has he learned from them?

"Stay focused. Stay calm," Chen said.

Chen earned a bye into this event by competing at the JGP Final last month in Fukuoka, Japan, where he finished third. He earned gold medals at his two assigned events, JGP Mexico and JGP Belarus. A three-time U.S. champion at the novice (2010-11) and junior (2012) levels, Chen now has his eye on a fourth title.

Ma, the defending pewter medalist who trains in Hackensack, N.J., with coach Steven Rice, battled a broken blade just before making the trip to Boston.

"I really didn't know what was going to happen here: how I would skate, how I would stand up," Ma said.

But stand up he did. Skating to "Montserrat-Orquesta Del Plata" by Bajofondo Tango Club, his performance was solid. He opened with a brilliant triple Lutz-triple toe loop and didn't back down. In all, Ma performed three triple jumps, a splendid double Axel and displayed a dazzling step sequence and combination spin.

He left the ice holding his arms to the sky and his head held high.

Ma said he was particularly happy with his jumps.

"When I'm working on my jumps at home, I'm very meticulous about every single motion," he said.

Ma came into this event wanting to step up higher on the podium.

"Last year was surreal for me," he said. "But, I thought I could do better."

Skating to "House of the Rising Sun," Vrdoljak opened with a triple toe-triple toe combination and earned the second-highest program components score to sit just 0.02 points behind Ma. Vrdoljak was the bronze medalist on the novice level last year.

Belmontes, who was eighth in novice at the 2012 U.S. Championships, skated a mostly clean program to "Through the Storm" by Nigel Kennedy to secure fourth place.



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