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Team USA scores gold trifecta at JGP Mexico

Chen, Edmunds, Hawayek and Baker top podiums in Mexico City

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Men's champion Nathan Chen (center) kicked off the gold party for Team USA. -Stefanie Mathewson

It was a perfect trifecta for Team USA, as Americans won gold in ladies, men's and ice dance. Nathan Chen set the tone, winning his second career JGP gold medal Friday, before Polina Edmunds, and Kaitlin Hawayek and Jean-Luc Baker won gold in ladies and ice dance, respectively, Saturday.

Mariah Bell added a bronze medal, while Tomoki Hiwatashi's first JGP experience was cut short by an ankle injury sustained in practice Wednesday.

Chen easily skated to the gold medal, winning both segments of competition en route to an 18.98-point win over Japan's Ryuju Hino. Chen finished with 218.62 total points. Hino, who qualified for the 2012 JGP Final, earned a total of 199.64 points, followed by Israel's Daniel Samohin with 182.89.

Chen's free skate, set to "Chatanooga Choo Choo" and "Summertime," was completely clean, with each of the 12 elements receiving plus GOEs. The program was heavily back-loaded, meaning Chen reserved six of his eight jumping elements for the second half of the program, allowing each of those six jumps to get a 10-percent bonus. The strategy paid off as his triple Lutz-double toe-double loop and triple flip-triple toe combinations netted at least 10.50 points each.

Chen's program components (PCS) mark of 70.20 (out of a free skate score of 144.40 points) was the highest in the field by nearly seven points.

"Last season was a very difficult year for me, and I wanted to come back strong this season," Chen said after the win. "I worked hard over the summer and am happy about my performances in Mexico City. I am proud of my two clean programs and the PCS marks as well. I am looking forward to my next competition."

Like Chen, Edmunds sailed to the win, claiming gold by 17.48 points. The 2013 U.S. junior champion turned in a final score of 171.21 points in her first career JGP event. Russia's Natalia Ogoreltsev (153.73) edged Bell (153.17) by barely a half-point for the silver medal.

Edmunds executed a triple Lutz-triple toe jump combination in both of her programs and added a triple flip-single loop-triple Salchow and three Level 4 spins in her free skate to the music of Edvard Grieg.

"I was very excited go to Mexico and was even more ecstatic with how beautiful the rink was setup and Mexican culture," Edmunds said. "I am pleased with my performances, for pushing through them. The medal is the icing on top of the cake!"

Bell traveled to Mexico with a slight advantage: The Colorado-based athlete is accustomed to skating in altitude, something that came in handy at Mexico City's 7,800 feet above sea level.

"Competing here has been a great experience, and the people have been very gracious," she said. "I am really proud of my performance in the free skate and will never forget my first Junior Grand Prix."

Hawayek and Baker's second season together started out strong as the duo won its first JGP title (second medal). The duo narrowly edged Canada's Madeline Edwards and Zhao Kai Pang by two points.

Hawayek and Baker totaled 136.45 points, while Edwards and Pang earned 134.02 points for the week. The Canadians' free dance score of 80.56 points was 0.22 points higher than that of Hawayek and Baker.

"It has been an incredible experience and an honor to be part of Team USA here at JGP Mexico," Hawayek and Baker said. "We are really happy with our performances and thrilled to have earned our first JGP gold medal."

Skating their free to selections from *Amélie*, Hawayek and Baker set an international personal best score. The program featured a pair of Level 4 lifts and a Level 3 circular step sequence worth 8.17 points.

The gap between silver and bronze was almost 22 points. Russia's Sofia Evdokimova and Egor Bazin moved up from fourth after the short to win their first JGP medal with 112.78 points. Representing Team USA for the first time, Chloe Rose Lewis and Logan Bye finished fifth.

JGP Slovakia is up next for Team USA, while the senior international season also begins next week from the 2013 U.S. International Figure Skating Classic in Salt Lake City.



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