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The Inside Edge: Chen, Edmunds headline 'EWC'

Miner enjoying new training venue; Skaters run into gymnast Douglas

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Although both are coming off injuries, Polina Edmunds and Nathan Chen treated fans to memorable performances at 'An Evening with Champions.' -Sarah S. Brannen

"An Evening with Champions," the annual Jimmy Fund benefit run entirely by Harvard University students, made an early appearance this year on Sept. 9 and 10 at Harvard's Bright Arena. Nathan Chen, Polina Edmunds and Kimmie Meissner starred, along with two-time Olympic champions Oleg and Ludmila Protopopov and a host of skaters who are enrolled at Harvard.

All proceeds from the show, which has raised more than \$2.8 million over the past 46 years, benefit cancer care and research at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

On Saturday afternoon, families of young cancer patients and survivors, as well as siblings of the patients, were invited to the arena to skate. About a dozen kids took the ice with the stars of the show.

"What I love so much is that they include the whole family," said Julia Pettengill, a mother of a child who is a survivor. "We've been coming to this event since 2011. It was very powerful, the first time we ever came to the Kids' Skate."

Pettengill's daughter, Sophie, was diagnosed with leukemia at the age of 2 1/2. She was just 3 when the family first came to the Kids' Skate.

"Sophie was in the middle of treatment. She felt absolutely terrible; she had no hair," Pettengill said. "She put her skates on, and these two wonderful young men came and got down on bended knee and said, 'Come with us.'"

Those two young men were Andrew Speroff and Mark Jahnke. They twirled Sophie around, and she left the ice saying, "I skated with my princes!" Sophie was treated for two years at the Jimmy Fund Clinic at Dana-Farber, and she is now a survivor and a thriving third-grader.

The show

Emily Hughes hosted both shows Friday and Saturday, without her usual co-host, Paul Wylie. Wylie, who is in Brazil skating in a show, recorded a message for the audience, which was played after the intermission. (He said he promised to be back next year.) Hughes didn't skate a solo, but her mother, father and sister came to watch her. Hughes' mother, Amy, is, of course, a cancer survivor and a passionate supporter of the cause.

Christina Gao's parents were also in the audience to watch their daughter for what she said was her last performance for "a long while." Gao is in her senior year at Harvard and will be working for an investment company in New York City next year. She still does a little bit of coaching but said she probably won't be skating much once she starts work.

Other Harvard students who skated included junior Yasmin Siraj and freshman Selena Zhao.

"I'm still getting used to being in college," Zhao said. "It's definitely very different, especially since I've spent most of my life around skaters! Being surrounded by Harvard students is really cool."

Zhao, the 2015 Canadian junior champion, is undecided as to whether she will continue to compete now that she's in college. She trains with Mark Mitchell and Peter Johansson.

"I'm still training every day," she said. "I definitely don't want to close any doors. I still love skating, but it's a transitional period and I'm trying to figure out what my direction now is. We'll see what the course load

becomes, because it's just the first week of class right now."

Chen looked to be in great shape after his injury last January, when he suffered a hip avulsion fracture during the gala exhibition at the U.S. championships. He landed several crisp triple jumps, including lutz, flip and toe, in his program to Kygo's "Stole the Show." Skating in the show for the fourth time, he delivered a passionate interpretation, and his presentation showed a new level of maturity.

Chen said he enjoyed spending time at Harvard, which he would like to eventually attend.

"It's amazing here, and the audience is great," Chen said. "The students do a really good job of the show, and it's for the Jimmy Fund -- I feel so honored and lucky to skate here."

Chen is a senior in high school but plans to take a gap year next year to focus on making the Olympic team.

Edmunds skated a sassy program to Lady Gaga's "Americano," without jumps.

"I am slowly getting back into jumping, with my recovery process from my injury earlier this year," Edmunds said. "Though I'm not jumping here this weekend, it's great to perform my show program in front of an audience as the season is beginning, to feel a little adrenaline!"

The Protopopovs first skated in the show in 1979. Now 80 and 84, they still skate with lovely lines and the smoothest edges imaginable.

Alexei Bychenko of Israel showed off his new short program to "Chambermaid Swing." He promised to ramp up the jump content when the program is ready for competition.

"Triple axel and quad will be in the program later. I would like to do [them], but I am not in shape yet," he said.

MIT sophomore Kevin Shum also skated his new short program to "Eleanor Rigby."

Meissner performed a soulful number to "Ave Maria," and Hicks presented her usual huge jumps in her routine to Adele's "Hello." Douglas Razzano brought a polished, powerful program to "The Sound of Silence." Shawn Sawyer skated a new, very intense program to Cirque du Soleil's "Mutuation," complete with his mind-blowing spirals and a backflip. Shotaro Omori and the Haydenettes concluded the show.

The reception

The weather in Boston was warm, and Arizonan Razzano was suffering in the swampy humidity.

"I'm OK if it's 105 degrees but dry!" he said, pulling at his shirt. "I'm a witch, and I'm melting."

Sawyer said he has been focusing on choreography, writing some children's stories and painting every day. His "Mutation" program is quite intense, and he said he enjoys showing off that side of his personality.

"I'm either shy and keen, or loud and obnoxious," he said. "Can I say keen? Do Americans say that?"

Ross Miner was in the audience watching his girlfriend, Heidi Munger, skate to "Rise Up." Miner was supposed to skate Friday, but his coaches put the kibosh on the idea. Miner will be competing in a few days at the U.S. International Classic in Salt Lake City.

"I've never been so ready," he said after the show.

Miner is enjoying training at a facility north of Boston, where his coaches, Mitchell and Johansson, recently moved their team (they're still part of the Skating Club of Boston). The rink in Revere is bigger, and the skaters have the ice all day, all week.

"I loved skating at the club (SCOB)," Miner said, "But this feels so awesome."

One of five

Skaters love gymnastics, and there was no way the gold-medal-winning Final Five gymnastics team from Rio could be in Colorado Springs without running into some skater fans. Ice dancer Tim Koleto and several coaches were excited to meet three-time Olympic gold medalist Gabby Douglas at an Old Chicago restaurant last week.

Douglas, wearing a sleeveless Nike T-shirt, told the skating folk she loves figure skating and always imagines herself doing it when she watches. Drew Meekins offered to give her lessons if she ever wanted to learn to skate.

Koleto, who formerly competed in singles in the U.S. and now represents Japan as an ice dancer, was in town with partner Misato Komatsubara for some choreography sessions with Christopher Dean, Ben Agosto and Patti Gottwein.

Bridesman

Pairs skater Alexandria Shaughnessy couldn't imagine getting married without her partner, Jimmy Morgan, so she included him in her bevy of bridesmaids as a "bridesman" during her wedding to

Jonathan Ronzio at her parents home in Duxbury, Massachusetts, on Sept. 3. Many skaters attended, including Simon Shnapir, Miner, Erika Smith and AJ Reiss, as did the pair's coaches, Bobby Martin and Carrie Wall.

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