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Chen powers way to gold in return to Salt Lake City

Aaron takes silver, refers to Chen as "once-in-a-generation type of guy"

Posted 9/16/17 by Philip Hersh, special to icenetwork



Nathan Chen was simply too strong on his way to earning the gold medal at the 2017 U.S. International Figure Skating Classic. -Melissa Majchrzak

It's the same wondrous story, with a new twist.

Nathan Chen made more personal and global skating history Friday night at the [2017 U.S. International Figure Skating Classic](#) by landing a clean quadruple loop on the first attempt at the jump in his competitive career.

And, Chen did it in his first competition of the Olympic season, on the rink where he first took to the ice at age two, a rink built as a practice facility for the 2002 Winter Olympics. He did it in a free skate that made him an easy winner over teammate Max Aaron.

So, he is now the first man to land five different quads -- lutz, flip, salchow, loop and toe loop -- although not all in one program.

Not yet, anyway.

His coach, Rafael Arutunian, said that could happen, suggesting Chen might go for seven quads in a free skate.

"That's a little crazy talk, I think," Chen said. "I think there is a lot of potential with the programs I have right now, and adding in a bunch of quads isn't the main priority. It's building back to where I was and keep on evolving the rest of the program."

Aaron, who has mastered two quads, disagrees. He said with no reservations that Chen, 18, will be the first to do seven quads in a free skate and nine in a two-program competition. The only quad out of Chen's sight so far is the axel.

"This is a once-in-a-generation type of guy," Aaron said of Chen. "What the kid is doing is unbelievable. You can't express how difficult the things he does are. He makes it look so easy. He's superhuman.

"I don't know about quad axel, but at this point, I know he can do a seven-quad program," he added. "He's the only one ever in figure skating who will be able to do seven quads in one program. He'll be the first guy ever to do a quad-quad - quad lutz-quad toe. I've seen him practicing it."

Arutunian called the seven-quad program "a project" with no set timeline. Since a skater can repeat just two types of quads in a free skate, a minimum of five types is necessary.

"How many he will do depends on his condition, his health," the coach said. "That's the ideal situation. He now has the possibility to try."

Last season, his debut year on the senior circuit internationally, Chen did six quads that received full base value in the free skate at the World Figure Skating Championships and five-for-five clean quads at the Four Continents and U.S. championships.

In his Friday unveiling of a new free skate to music from the movie, "Mao's Last Dancer," with a section of Stravinsky's music from the history-making ballet "The Rite of Spring" in the middle, Chen planned three quads but did only two.

"It's a pretty monumental piece of the movie," Chen said of "The Rite of Spring," so avant-garde at its 1913 debut that it caused a riotous reaction in the audience. That it was a revolutionary piece culturally led to its natural inclusion in a movie that begins in the era of Mao's bloody Cultural Revolution.

The quad loop was Chen's opening jump, and it received a GOE (Grade of Execution) of +1.6. His quad lutz earned +2.2.

Despite watering down a planned quad toe to a double, Chen wound up with a total of 275.04 points to 261.56 for Aaron and 248.29 for third-place finisher Liam Firus of Canada.

"It's cool," Chen said of the quad loop. "I wanted to do that. But I messed up on the toe. That will bug me a little bit."

"I'm happy," Arutunian said. "New quad, and good execution of it. Good execution on lutz. I'm happy (with) triple axel at the end of the program, which is difficult for him. But there is a lot of work (to do.)"

Aaron did three quads, landing a quad toe-double toe and solo quad toe cleanly, but put a hand down on the landing of his quad salchow. He had a two-footed landing on a double axel, of all things, late in the program.

"My whole goal is when I'm off like tonight, when everything was off, to still be able to (stay) on my feet," Aaron said. "I've been really, really practicing that a lot.

"When I have the hard days is when it counts the most," he continued. "(It's) having a tough day, how can I work through it. They can really, really go in the toilet. When it's hard, I'm thinking, 'How can I compose myself, how can I perform and still track the quads in mid-air and land on my feet?' Tonight was a good battle, and I think I won it."

Chen won the event -- and another line in the sport's history books.



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