

Winter Olympics Part 3

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Richard C. Crepeau

University of Central Florida, richard.crepeau@ucf.edu

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE - WINTER OLYMPICS PART 3
FEBRUARY 23, 2018

The final two premier figure skating events of the Winter Olympics were held this week. They were hotly contested and the skating itself was some of the best ever seen at the Olympics.

Although Ice Dancing and Women's Figure Skating are considerably different in both skills and styles, the competitions developed in very similar fashion. In both disciplines, the gold medal free skate featured a battle of two competitors. For the bronze medal the situation was the same. Realistically there were only two contestants in each event who could win bronze.

In the battles for gold, the margins in the short program were very small. In the battle for bronze, there was very little separation between third and fourth place in the short program.

In the Ice Dancing Free Skate Maia and Alex Subatani, skating the best program of their careers, won the bronze medal. They had been in fourth place after the short program but were only .02 points back of the 2018 U.S. Champions, Madison Hubbell and Zachery Donahue. As with so many others in these competitions, the Subatanis skated a "personal best" to win the bronze medal.

In the battle for the gold medal, the two pairs, considered the best in the world, faced off: Tessa Virtue and Scott Moir of Canada and Gabriella Papadakis and Guillaume Cizeron of France. In the short program, the Canadians built a small lead over the French team, a lead that may in some measure have been due to a malfunction of the halter-top of Gabriella's costume just as the program began. At a minimum, this was a distraction.

These two teams had contrasting styles in the free skate, and indeed, in their skating generally. The French featured a balletic style with projecting considerable emotion and romance. The Canadians stress was on more athletic skating and upbeat tempo. Both were extremely good at what they did.

Papadakis and Cizeron skated first and laid down a record setting performance of 123.35 points. It was a thing of beauty and reminiscent of the great ice dancing pairs like Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean. Virtue and Moir's performance was brilliant, fast, smooth, and in perfect harmony with the music. Their score was 122.20. The margin in the short program provided the difference and delivered the gold medal to Virtue and Moir.

Earlier in the evening Scott Hamilton made the observation that if the score was close there would be an endless argument over which of these pairs was the best. Those who liked the romantic and balletic style would argue for the French couple, while those who preferred the more dazzling and energetic style would support the Canadians. For me, the French were the better of two, but that, as Hamilton noted, is a matter of personal taste.

What is fascinating was how this same juxtaposition of styles would surface again in the women's free skate, and, I suspect, produce a similar argument.

With gold and silver all but guaranteed to the Russians the battle for the bronze medal came down to a competition between Satoko Miyahara of Japan and Kaetlyn Osmond of Canada. Again it was a case of Osmond skating a personal best, and for the first time this season completing a program without a fall. Skating to Swan Lake, Osmond produced an elegant and beautiful performance.

In the most anticipated competition of the evening two Russians faced one another. Evgenia Medvedeva, the 18 year old two time world champion, finished second in the short program just 1.13 points behind her new rival, Alina Zagitova, the 15 year old Russian who had won the European championship over Medvedeva just a few weeks before the Olympic Games.

Zagitova skated first and produced a record breaking performance racking up 156.65 points. Zagitova skated to the wonderfully lively music from the ballet "Don Quixote." It was attuned to her athletic style, and featured a dazzling array of seven triple jumps. It was a near perfect performance. Despite the fact that Alina Zagitova is noted for her athleticism, her artistry, on this particular evening, was much in evidence. Every move, every step, and every jump was perfectly aligned with Minkus's music. As I watch her, I felt it was very much like watching the ballet. I took a second look today, and was even more impressed by all aspects of her performance.

Two skaters later, and the final skater of the night or day, depending on where you were when watching, was Evgenia Medvedeva. She skated to the soundtrack from "Anna Karenina." It could not have been any better. Her skating was near perfection, her sense of the music exquisite, and her projection of the mood of the story very powerful. It was moving and beautiful pulling the audience into the story, and more than worthy of a gold medal. Medvedeva's score for the free skate was 156.65. She was

awarded first in the free skate by the judges as her component score was higher than that of Zagitova.

However, when the points were totaled the margin between gold and silver was 1.13 points, making Alina Zagitova the second youngest Olympic gold medalists in the history of this event. I think, as was the case in ice dancing, the supporters of both of these marvelous skaters can make the case that one or the other was the winner. Again, as a matter of taste, I preferred Evgenia Medvedeva for the beauty and elegance of here skating, but there is no doubt that Alina Zagitova was pure gold.

The striking thing to me was how these two competitions were so much alike in style and outcome, with the gold and silver medalists in each skating record setting performances. I have been watching figure skating for a very long time, and in my memory, I can recall nothing to match the skill and artistry of these two magnificent women.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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