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Glenn out to end Russian reign at junior worlds

Texas native leads team of 18 U.S. skaters into Sofia, Bulgaria

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Amber Glenn hopes her arsenal of triple-triples is enough to dethrone the Russians at the world junior championships. -Jay Adeff

Amber Glenn watched the recent Olympic Winter Games on TV and took particular notice of not only how Russian skaters Julia Lipnitskaia and Adelina Sotnikova had triple-triples in their arsenal but also how they contorted themselves into a variety of difficult positions on their spins.

"It's the details I need to work on," said Glenn, the U.S. junior champion. "Not only do you want to get the levels, but also you want to get the +2 and +3s on the [grades of execution for the] spins, too."

So Glenn, who will be competing at the [2014 World Junior Figure Skating Championships](#), March 10-16 in Sofia, Bulgaria, spent a couple of hours trying to bend her body into similar positions the gumby-like Russians put themselves into in Sochi.

"That one spin that Julia does is just impossible," Glenn said, laughing, referring to the tricky maneuver in which Lipnitskaia spins on one leg while pulling the other leg straight above her head. "I tried to do it for hours, and I just can't. It kind of freaks me out. Right now, I have to stick with what I know, but I think it would be cool down to road to come up with a spin and maybe have a move named after you."

Glenn, who trains in the Dallas area with coaches Ann Brumbaugh and Ben Shrots, isn't planning on unveiling a new spin in Bulgaria, but she does hope to display increased speed in the spins she does have and still land two triple-triples. Her free skate includes a triple flip-triple toe and triple Lutz-triple toe, making her program quite competitive for junior worlds.

"I'm really, really motivated, and I'm going to try to top my nationals performance," said Glenn, 14, who scored 186.51 points at the 2014 U.S. Figure Skating Championships. "That was not my best, and I'm really excited to show what I can do."

Glenn is one of three American women who will be competing at the world junior championships, where she will be joined by Tyler Pierce, the U.S. junior silver medalist, and Karen Chen, who withdrew after the short program in Boston because of a foot injury. According to her coach, Tammy Gambill, Chen is now recovered and ready for competition.

"Karen is doing much, much better," Gambill said. "She's so tough; it's hard to hold her back. We just didn't feel it would be safe or sound for her to do her long program at nationals. But now she's much better and doing full run-throughs."

Pierce, the 2013 U.S. champion at the novice level, has made quite a jump in the past year.

"She is very, very fierce," said Gambill, who coaches both Chen and Pierce in Southern California. "She's hungry for the next level. She's always wanting to do more."

The Americans know their biggest competition will come from Russia. Elena Radionova, the defending world junior champion, will be joined by Junior Grand Prix Final champion Maria Sotskova and Serafina Sakhanovich, the silver medalist at the JGP Final. The last three world junior champions have hailed from Russia: Sotnikova in 2011, Lipnitskaia in 2012 and Radionova last season.

"The Russians will be tough," Gambill said. "They won't be holding back."

Representing the United States in the men's event are Nathan Chen, Jordan Moeller and Shotaro Omori. U.S. junior champions Madeline Aaron and Max Settle lead the pairs contingent and will be joined by Kaitlin Budd and Nikita Cheban, and Aya Takai and Brian Johnson. (Takai and Johnson flew to Sofia straight from The Hague, Netherlands, where they finished second at the Challenge Cup, because they had to meet the technical minimums required by the ISU to compete at one of its championship events; the pair did so relatively easily.) In dance, Team USA is represented by junior champions Kaitlin

Hawayek and Jean-Luc Baker, Lorraine McNamara and Quinn Carpenter, and Rachel Parsons and Michael Parsons.

Chen has been especially strong this season, having won two Junior Grand Prix events, finishing third at the JGP Final and winning the U.S. junior crown. Coached by Rafael Arutunian, he has trained alongside Olympian Ashley Wagner and Adam Rippon.

Moeller, who was second behind Chen in Boston, is planning to put a triple Axel in his short program in Sofia, his coach, Kori Ade, said. The skater and coach discussed the idea of adding the jump before the latter went to Sochi to coach Jason Brown in the Olympics, but Ade told Moeller the decision ultimately was up to him.

"I told him, 'You've got to own the risk, and I'll let you own the reward,'" Ade said.

For Moeller, who will turn 19 in April, this will be his first and last opportunity to take part in this competition.

"I'm glad he was chosen to compete at junior worlds," Ade said. "I think he is going to blossom and be an incredibly strong senior competitor."

Omori, meanwhile, did not compete in Boston, as he was recovering from an ankle injury. A bronze medalist at junior worlds last year, he has just one competition to his credit this season: JGP Slovakia, where he placed fifth. He only returned to the ice about a week before the U.S. championships. Gambill, his coach, said Omori was monitored shortly before she left for Sochi to coach Australia's Brendan Kerry (who, by the way, will also be at junior worlds).

As for pairs, Aaron and Settlage are hoping to build on what they accomplished at the U.S. championships. The free skate has often been the Achilles heel for the couple, but they were able to overcome mistakes in that portion of the competition to maintain a strong performance -- a big achievement for the pair.

"They just were monitored, and the feedback was that they were pleased with the amount of attack they saw in them," said their coach, Dalilah Sappenfield, who works with the skaters in Colorado Springs, Colo. "We've really worked at being more aggressive in the long program, and we did a lot of work finishing each element and polishing things as well."

All three U.S. ice dancing teams have competed at junior worlds before, with Hawayek and Baker faring the best of the three with a seventh-place showing last year. The last time a U.S. team won the world junior dance title happened to be when the event was last held in Sofia, in 2009. That year, Madison Chock took the gold with her former partner, Greg Zuerlein.



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