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## Reinventing the Abbott! Old champ seizes lead

Dornbush second after program of lifetime; Brown takes third, Aaron fourth

Posted 1/11/14 by Lynn Rutherford, special to icenetwork



*The night belonged to Jeremy Abbott, who was the embodiment of figure skating perfection. His record score of 99.86 was almost eight points more than were scored by his closest challenger, putting him on the verge of winning his fourth U.S. title. -Jay Adef*

On Wednesday, [Jeremy Abbott](#) expressed a single goal for what he said would be his final U.S. championships: qualify for one of two men's spots on the U.S. Olympic team, by any means possible.

"I have to do my job," he told reporters after his first practice at Boston's TD Garden. "It doesn't have to be magical; that's the bottom line. I don't think I have to skate this amazing, otherworldly, phenomenal program like I've done to win my past three U.S. titles."

He must have been playing possum.

On Friday night at the [2014 Prudential U.S. Figure Skating Championships](#), the three-time U.S. champion skated his finest short program ever, and the greatest ever seen at a U.S. championships. It gained 99.86 points, shattering the skater's own U.S. record of 90.23 points set at the 2012 U.S. Championships.

Skating to Jun Miyake's "Lillies of the Valley," Abbott's controlled, introspective performance wove superb spins and jumps -- including a quad toe-triple toe combination, triple Lutz and triple Axel -- into intricate choreography. It was skating at its very best: a seamless blend of artistry and technique.

"This is a night I'm never going to forget," the 28-year-old said. "It's magical, it's special, especially to me. What a great way to end my U.S. championships' short program career."

Yuka Sato, who coaches Abbott at Detroit Skating Club, sent Abbott onto the ice with the same words she has used for years: "Take it one thing at a time."

"That was really magical, but at the same time his training has been very consistent," she said. "Some days when he is really on, he skates as well as he did here, so it's not a surprise for me."

The performance was the culmination of a two-year training plan that revamped everything, from Abbott's nutrition and off-ice training, to his practice habits and mental game.

"We made a very strong plan, a strategic plan, and worked slow and steady," Abbott said. "We've been seeing the progress, even if the audience hasn't seen the progress. I see it mentally and physically every day. When things didn't work in competition, I believed in what we had done and I kept plugging at it."

"We've been really trying to stay focused in the action instead of analyzing how he is feeling in too much detail," Sato said. "He's an amazing skater, but at the same time, we needed more consistency. It's been a long, long journey."

One that's not quite over. Although he takes a 7.82-point lead into Sunday's free skate, Abbott isn't taking that Olympic spot for granted.

"The whole goal here was to get the business done; just get to Sochi," he said. "That's still the goal. I'm still not trying to throw up a 300 score and be ridiculous. I'm taking enjoying this experience for what it is and getting the job done."

Richard Dornbush created some magic of his own, earning 92.04 points for an exceptionally smooth and stylish program to Henry Mancini's "Sons of Italy."

The 22-year-old Southern Californian, who is coached by Tammy Gambill, hit an opening quad Salchow, followed by a triple Axel and triple Lutz-triple toe combination. His spins were crisp, his steps fast and fluid. It was his first clean short program of the season and his first as a senior at the U.S. championships.

"I knew it was in my cookbook, and it was time to cook it up," Dornbush said.

Redemption must taste sweet. After winning the 2011 U.S. silver medal, the skater struggled with boot issues and injuries the next two seasons, hitting his nadir with back-to-back 13th place finishes at the 2012 U.S. Championships and 2012 Four Continents Figure Skating Championships.

"There was a lot of discouragement," Dornbush said. "There were quitting issues. But tonight, I finally set that enemy -- me -- aside and overcame it."

Jason Brown grabbed third place with an exceptionally musical and entertaining short to Prince's "The Question of U."

While the 19-year-old didn't do a quad, his jumps -- including a triple Axel, triple flip-triple toe and triple Lutz -- were clean, and his Gumby-like spins and steps were endlessly interesting. He earned 87.47 points.

"It's my second year doing the program, and my choreography feels marinated," Brown said. "Before I skated, my coach (Kori Ade) was like, 'This is an Olympic year; you fight for everything you do.' I thought of that when I went out there."

Defending U.S. champion Max Aaron has some ground to make up if he wants to earn one of the two U.S. men's Sochi spots.

The 21-year-old landed his opening quad Salchow but was unable to complete a triple toe and settled for a quad-double combination. The rest of his short to a Latin medley was clean but a bit rough around the edges. It earned 86.95 points.

"My skate tonight went really well for how the season has been going for me," Aaron said, adding that with the two quad Salchows and two triple Axels he plans in his free skate, he is still in the hunt for a Sochi spot.

"The long program sets the men apart from the boys, that's what I always say," he said. "I have the arsenal in jump content. I have five or six points, I think, on the next highest man ... I'm here to skate my skate and see where I land."

World junior champion Joshua Farris is fifth after a clean performance to Piazzolla's "Libertango" that earned 78.37 points. Adam Rippon had a disappointing fall on his triple Axel and sits sixth with 77.58 points.



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