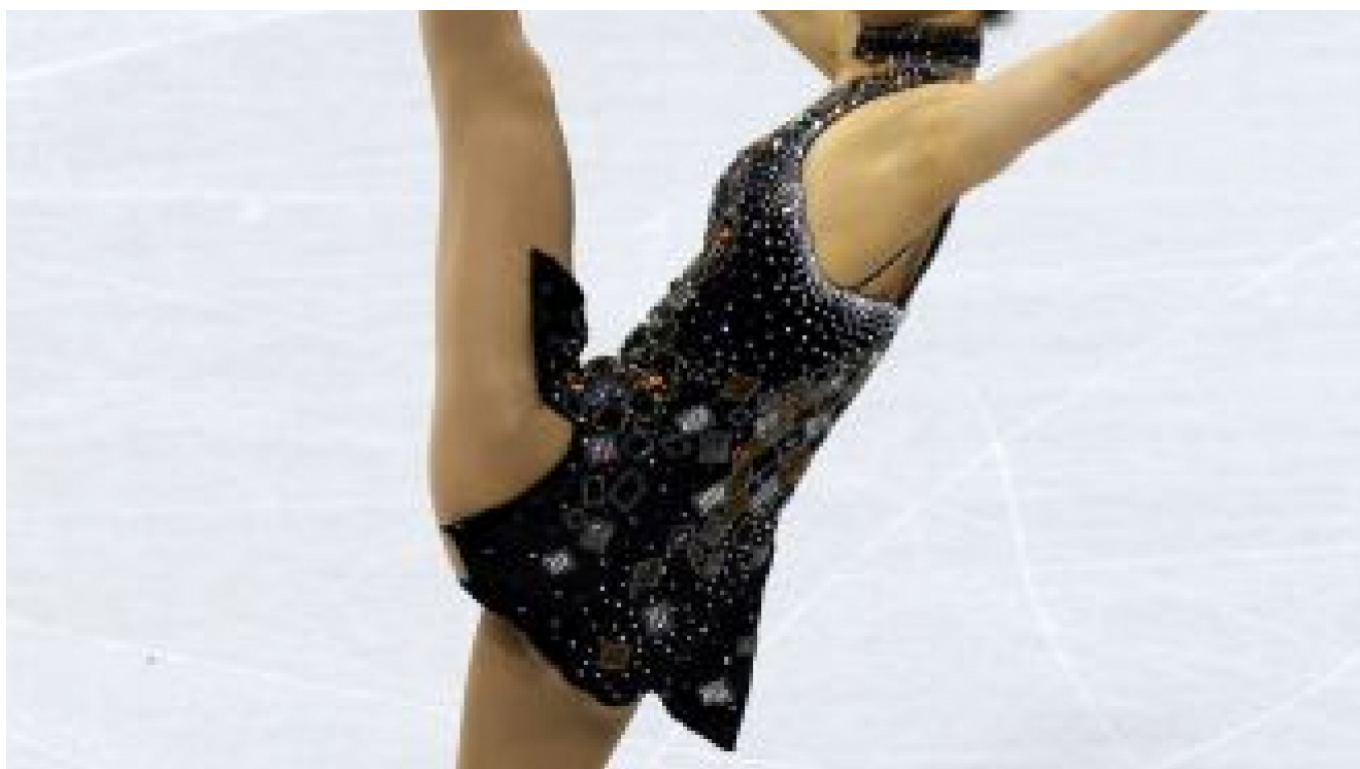


Plushenko, Volchkova Speak On the Worlds

By [Alec Luhn](#)

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South Korean star Yuna Kim performing the short program at the 2010 Olympics. Kim, as well as many figure skaters for Japan, will pose a challenge to the medal hopes of Russia's skaters.

The 2011 World Figure Skating Championships are arriving in Moscow with the sweet taste of the successful bid to host — and the bitter aftertaste of the tragic events that made it possible.

That was the perspective imparted by star performers in Russian figure skating — Olympic gold medalist Yevgeny Plushenko and Olympian and trainer Viktoria Volchkova — when they spoke with The Moscow Times on the eve of the championships.

Though the event is a chance to increase the sport's popularity and inspire future figure skaters in Russia, the series of tragedies that forced Japan to decline to host saddened the Russian skaters, many of whom have trained and competed with Japanese colleagues.

"There was great grief over what happened in Japan," Plushenko said in an interview Thursday. "My sympathies are with the Japanese. I love and respect this people. Over the years I've performed a lot in Japan."

Yet, the championships will help inspire a new generation to reinvigorate a figure skating legacy that has lost its luster in recent years, Plushenko said.

"It's very cool that six years later, another world championship will take place in Russia," he explained. "It's very good that Russian spectators will watch international athletes, the elites of figure skating. Our children ... will see the elegance of figure skating and learn a little."

The pre-eminent Russian skater, who won the men's singles competition at the world championships three times, wanted to compete at this year's championship. But Plushenko, who currently skates professionally, wasn't able to reinstate his amateur status in time.

Plushenko will attend the event to watch fellow greats, he said — and to scope out the competition that he will face if or when he returns to the competition circuit.

"I'm interested to watch Nobunari Oda, Daisuki Takahashi, Artur Gachinsky," Plushenko said, naming two leading Japanese skaters and a Russian skater who is both 17 years old and the highest-ranked men's figure skater among Russians.

"In general, in men's singles, I'm interested to watch my competitors for next season," Plushenko noted.

Well-known Volchkova called the event an "extra push" for Russian skating's popularity and development, and she said performing at home could give Russian skaters an advantage.

"The world championships will add popularity" for the sport in Russia, Volchkova said. "And for our athletes, of course, to perform on their home turf [will give] support and will make a big difference."

Both Plushenko and Volchkova said Russian skaters had a good chance of winning at the championships, especially in the pairs event, since the Russian team of Yuko Kavaguti and Alexander Smirnov have significant experience competing on the international level. Current Russian pairs champions Tatyana Volosozhar and Maxim Trankov have a lot of potential, Plushenko said, despite the fact that they teamed up only last year.

Still, the current Russian lineup hasn't yet reached the level of past Russian and Soviet greats, Plushenko said. Such pair skaters as Yelena Berezhnaya and Anton Sikharulidze or Tatyana Totmyanina and Maxim Marinin were "great athletes, the elite of figure skating," Plushenko said.

"Currently [Russia has] quality athletes, professionals at what they do, but they still need to grow," he noted.

The new hope of Russian figure skating, according to Volchkova and Plushenko, is Gachinsky.

"He's mastered all the most complicated elements of figure skating," Volchkova explained. "He still needs a little time and experience," she said.

Plushenko predicted that overall, the Japanese and American teams will be the strongest at the championships. "I consider the Japanese team that's coming to the world championships No. 1 in both men's and women's singles," Plushenko said.

A Japanese sweep of the championships perhaps would carry some poetic justice. Volchkova said the Russians will give them a run for their money.

"In all categories, especially pairs, Russia has very strong athletes," she said. "They'll pose worthy competition."

Plushenko also thought the competition was worthy, but through a different lens.

"Of course — and I'm not embarrassed about this — I will learn from the new generation, from young athletes," Plushenko said. "I'll take some cool bits ... and put them in my own program."

Figures Offer Glimpse of Skaters

Hailing from Russia as well as other countries, Russia's skaters in this year's World Figure Skating Championships are defined by their numbers: rankings, ages and medal counts. But their backgrounds also are part of the picture. Look below for who has skater champion parents, who came close to an Olympic medal and who is ranked highest among Russian men though he's also the youngest of them.

All rankings come from the International Skating Union, and skaters mentioned here without rankings aren't listed in those ISU World Standings.

PAIRS

Yuko Kavaguti

Born in Aichi, Japan, in 1981

and **Alexander Smirnov**

Born in Tver in 1984

Brought home 3rd at last year's Worlds

Came in 4th in 2010 Olympics

Kavaguti training in Russia since 2003

Vera Bazarova

Born in Yekaterinburg in 1993

and **Yury Larionov**

Born in Novosibirsk in 1986

Placed 8th at last year's Worlds

Came in 11th at 2010 Olympics

Teamed up in 2005

Tatyana Volosozhar

Born in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, in 1986

and **Maxim Trankov**

Born in Perm in 1983

He placed 4th at last year's Worlds with different partner

Also placed 7th at 2010 Olympics with different partner

She skated for Ukraine at 2010 Olympics, placed 8th

Katarina Gerboldt

Born in St. Petersburg in 1989

and **Alexander Enbert**

Born in St. Petersburg in 1989

He came in 24th at 2009 Worlds

No Olympics experience

She is ranked 55th worldwide

Teamed up only in spring 2010

Lyubov Ilyushechkina

Born in Moscow in 1991

and **Nodari Maisuradze**

Born in Lipetsk in 1988

No previous Worlds experience

No Olympics experience

Won the Worlds Juniors in 2009

MEN

Artur Gachinsky

Born in Moscow in 1993

Placed 3rd at last year's Worlds Juniors

No Olympics experience

Ranked 13th in the world

Highest-ranked Russian men's figure skater

Konstantin Menshov

Born in St. Petersburg in 1983

Placed 7th at this year's European

Championships

Didn't take part in 2010 Worlds finals

No Olympics experience

Ranked 41st worldwide

Trains in Latvia, Sweden and Russia

LADIES

Alyona Leonova

Born in St. Petersburg in 1990

Placed 13th at last year's Worlds

Came in 9th at 2010 Olympics

Ranked 8th in the world

Took up skating at age 4

Ksenia Makarova

Born in St. Petersburg in 1992

Placed 8th at last year's Worlds

Came in 10th at 2010 Olympics

Ranked 13th in the world

Daughter of Soviet pair skaters Larisa Seleznyova and Oleg Makarov

ICE DANCE

Yekaterina Bobrova

Born in Moscow in 1990

and **Dmitry Solovyev**

Born in Moscow in 1989

Placed 8th in last year's Worlds

Came in 15th at 2010 Olympics

Paired up in 2000

Her hobbies include biathlon, billiards

Yelena Ilinykh

Born in Shevchenko, Kazakhstan, in 1994

and **Nikita Katsalapov**

Born in Moscow in 1991

Didn't take part in 2010 Worlds finals

No Olympics experience

Came in 4th at 2011 European

Championships

Yekaterina Ryazanova

Born in Moscow in 1991

and **Ilya Tkachenko**

Born in Perm in 1986

No previous Worlds experience

No Olympics experience

Came in 6th in 2011 European

Championships

Sources: The International Skating Union web site for the World Figure Skating Championships (<http://www.isuworlds2011.com/participants.shtml>); ISU World Standings for Single & Pair Skating and Ice Dance (<http://www.isureresults.com/ws/ws/wsmen.htm> and www.isureresults.com/ws/ws/wsladies.htm).

— Box written and compiled by Rachel Nielsen

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