

# ISKATE

A male figure skater with blonde hair is captured in a dynamic pose on an ice rink. He is wearing a black and silver sequined costume with a grey long-sleeved shirt underneath. His right leg is extended back and to the side, while his left leg is forward. His arms are raised, with one hand near his head and the other extended forward. The ice surface is marked with numerous white scratches from previous skaters.

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*Complete coverage of the*  
**EUROPEAN  
CHAMPIONSHIPS**  
*from Sheffield*

**Plus synchro and  
Team GB Internationals,  
and more Dancing On Ice**





# FROM SHEFFIELD THE 2012 EUROPEAN

## Sheffield Europeans a success

Wednesday night, 25th January, Prince Edward, the Queen's fourth and youngest child, welcomed the British public to the event's opening ceremony, which starred, of course, Sinead and John Kerr, who retired from competition, because of her shoulder injury, after winning their second bronze in this event last year.

The Prince said that this event was special, coming as it did just a few days

before the Queen's Jubilee and the upcoming Olympic Summer Games in London.

Skaters and others associated with the event gave rave reviews, with John Kerr posting to his Facebook, "Definitely one of the best European Championships I have ever attended. Sheffield did us proud last week."

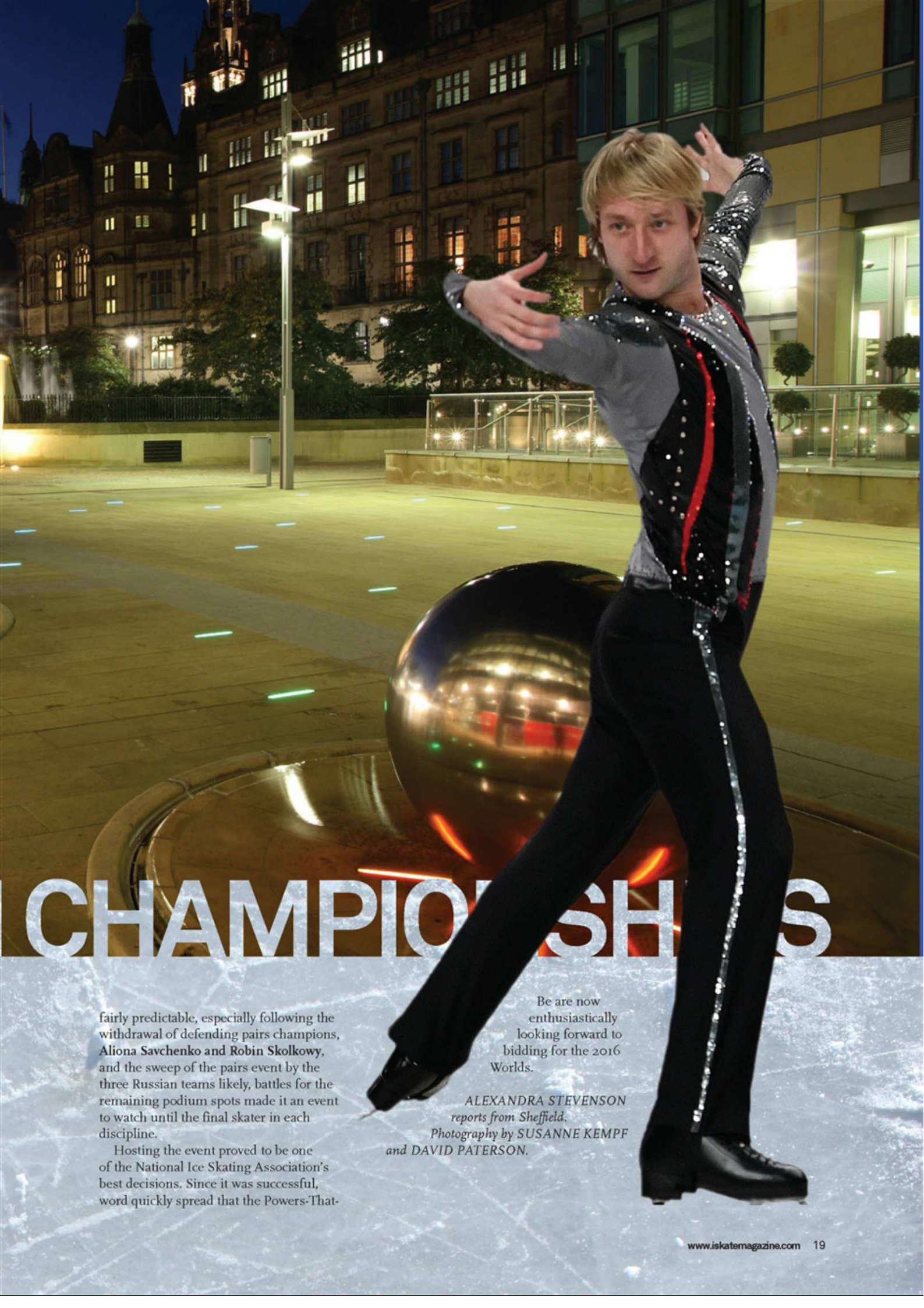
The event was the first ISU championship event to be held in Britain since the 1995 Worlds in

Birmingham. The last European Championships hosted on British soil were in 1989, also in Birmingham.

On the ice, all the gold-medal favourites won, as expected, though two – Evgeni Plushenko and Nathalie Pécahlat and Fabian Bourzat were both pipped in the Short – upstaged by younger upstarts – but their vulnerability made the finals that much more interesting.

Though the gold medallists were





# CHAMPIONSHIPS

fairly predictable, especially following the withdrawal of defending pairs champions, Aliona Savchenko and Robin Skolkowy, and the sweep of the pairs event by the three Russian teams likely, battles for the remaining podium spots made it an event to watch until the final skater in each discipline.

Hosting the event proved to be one of the National Ice Skating Association's best decisions. Since it was successful, word quickly spread that the Powers-That-

Be are now enthusiastically looking forward to bidding for the 2016 Worlds.

ALEXANDRA STEVENSON  
*reports from Sheffield.*  
Photography by SUSANNE KEMPF  
and DAVID PATERSON.



# European Championships

Men's

## The (almost) unbeatable Plushenko

Pipped in the short, Evgeni saves his 'Best' for last

In Sheffield, now 29, Evgeni Plushenko continued his pattern of winning only silver and gold in the European Championships. He made his debut in this event in 1998 not long after turning 15. (He would have been too young by today's rules.)

He now has a total of three European silvers and seven golds. Alexei Yagudin (1998 and 1999) and Brian Joubert (2004) are the only two skaters to defeat him.

Evgeni still gets rattled about the latter event, "That taught me a big lesson. I was so pleased with doing a triple-triple-triple that I lost my concentration. I learned that, no matter what, you have to keep concentrating on what comes next, not what is over."

Amazingly, considering the torn

meniscus in his knee, which must be repeatedly scraped, Evgeni won and not just by a sliver! He won with 261.23 points, 14.96 ahead of his teammate, Artur Gachinski. At the time, the mark set a new Personal Best and was the highest achieved in the 2011/12 season (Patrick Chan subsequently topped the mark at Four Continents).

Evgeni revealed he had another operation scheduled for February 23 in Munich. Concerns later surfaced that he might also require surgery for a herniated disc. That meant there was no chance he would recover in time for the World Championships in Nice at the end of March.

"But next season," he declared, "I will do everything – the Grand Prix events, Europeans, Worlds. It will be part of my Olympic preparation." That is despite the fact that he will have to face

reigning World champion, Patrick Chan on his home turf at the 2013 Worlds due to be held in London, Ontario, Canada.

Evgeni had not competed internationally since a disappointing and controversial second-place finish behind the quad-less American, Evan Lysacek. Consequently, the Russian champion had not met the requirement to post a certain amount of points in an ISU-recognised international over the last two seasons. Evgeni had to get a special dispensation from the ISU to compete in this event, which they readily gave in late December.

The same ruling kept the runner-up for the British title, Luke Chilcott, from being named as a reserve for this event. Luke, who lives and trains in Dallas, had not been aware of this requirement. NISA informed him too late

for it to be feasible for him to travel to Europe to compete in one of the

designated internationals and, unlike the three-times Olympic medallist, Luke could not receive special dispensation. Next year, however, the ISU have promised one or more North American qualifying internationals, which would be welcome news to the many of the skaters from around the world who train in the US and Canada.

Evgeni said he was not upset at all to be doing the Preliminary Round, "It gives me an extra opportunity to prepare."

At the Motorpoint Arena, Evgeni immediately showed off his quad in the first practice session on Sunday morning while stepping through his Tango de Roxanne FS. Later in the day, he did at least three quads on the practice rink at iceSheffield.

In the actual Preliminary Round, Evgeni presented a less difficult Free programme than the one he would skate later in the week, but still earned 157.52, a massive 42.88 ahead of the second placed Zoltan Kelemen from Romania.

Evgeni's quad jackknifed on the landing. He had to do a double three to hold the landing of his triple loop, and obviously tired towards the end when his last two spins were called only Level 1. Nevertheless, he pulled off a second triple Axel, in combination and he received several +3s (the maximum Grade of Execution) for his first triple Axel and Level 3 circular steps.

The winner of the SP was Artur Gachinski, 18. Artur, the 2010 World Junior champion, earned bronze in his first World senior championship in Moscow last April, after placing fifth in his Europeans debut.

Skating to Saint Louis Blues, Artur soared through a quad toe to triple toe, which earned +1.43 over the base value of 14.40. He landed solid triple Axel and triple loop and his spins were all Level 3 and 4. He was the only competitor to receive Level 4 for his circular steps, which included an intentionally comic moment.

Artur had the higher element score by 3.70, but Evgeni was 3.61 ahead on components, collectively putting Artur in first by 0.09 ahead of his teammate.

Artur said, "This is a great honour for me, because I always was looking up to Zhenya (Evgeni's nickname) and I

### Evgeni Plushenko



Evgeni Plushenko (RUS)  
DAVID PATERSON

meniscus in his knee, which must be repeatedly scraped, Evgeni won and



## Kevin van der Perren

**K**evin van der Perren (husband to British champion, **Jenna McCorkell**) withdrew after the warm-up of the Men's Free Skate. Kevin, the oldest man in the event – three months older than **Evgeni Plushenko** – had won bronze in the 2007 and 2009 European Championships but was lying 7<sup>th</sup> after the Short.

"I thought I wouldn't even make it through the Short Programme," he said. "About three weeks ago, my back began to hurt. Both practices here went badly because of the pain. I haven't been sleeping at all."

"Then in the SP I was so tired after the combination (triple flip to triple toe), I focused too much on the triple Axel and came too near the barrier on the triple Lutz." He fell badly on the Lutz, injuring his wrist.

He continued, "I wanted so much to skate well here. It is my last competition and all my friends and family are here."

His coach, **Silvie de Rijcke**, explained, "He fell on his wrist in the Short Programme. We didn't go to hospital with it but we think it may be broken. We tried to make it numb but then he couldn't feel anything. He decided during the warm-up for the Free to withdraw. This was to be his last competition, so he is very sad that he couldn't compete."

Kevin since confirmed on his Facebook page that he would be attending this year's World Championships in Nice.

He had attempted to keep the seriousness of the injury from his wife because he didn't want her preparation to be disturbed. He was scheduled to skate immediately following the second to last warm up, just before **Brian Joubert**.

The French heart-throb thanked Kevin for being very considerate: "He had told me in the dressing room that there was a chance of him withdrawing, so I adjusted my warm-up. I prepared as if I was to skate

first in the warm-up. He showed great sportsmanship for telling me and I want to thank him for that. Not everyone would have done that."

Kevin's Belgian teammate, **Jorik Hendrickx**, 19, was lying one place behind Kevin going into the FS. Jorik finished 9<sup>th</sup> overall – up from 20<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> in his previous two Europeans – and seems ready to take over the national responsibility. He laughed when asked whether he'd be staying around as long as Kevin had. Kevin's first European Championships was in 2000 when he'd finished 28<sup>th</sup>.

Finland's **Ari-Pekka Nurmenkari**, who injured his foot landing a triple badly and had to withdraw half way though his routine in the Qualifier.

still do. It was very nice to compete in this event with him and to fight for the medals. I think this was my best skate ever."

Evgeni, as expected, was a lot more forthcoming. "Of course I watched his (Artur's) programme. I watched all the programmes because the other skaters are all my rivals and they are all my competitors and they are all real masters."

"Artur showed a high level today. He performed excellent jumps and it is obvious that he won today. It is impossible to fight for me with the kind of programme I did today."

"It is hard without a quad, but the fact that I am sitting here and that I have a small medal, even though it is a silver one – I am very satisfied with that."

As usual, his coach, **Alexei Mishin** – who also coaches Artur – had a lot to say. "If someone wants to skate without a quad, they should organize a separate league – men's single dancing!..."

"Today, I'm happy about Artur, but especially happy about Evgeni's skating."

He came and showed that he's able to be a winner on one leg. No, the competition is not finished yet. Nobody knows what will happen tomorrow, but Evgeni showed that he's alive, strong and dangerous."

Evgeni readily admitted he was surprised to do so well in this portion of the event.

He said, "To be honest, I think that my rivals handed me a big present today. Obviously it was a surprise to be second without a quad in the Short Programme... but, of course, I still think that quads should be part of men's figure skating. I didn't do it today, because I just couldn't. I can do it as I showed in the qualifying round, but considering my age and all my titles, I should ask if I could stop for a break to give my leg some rest and



Kevin van der Perren (BEL)  
DAVID PATERSON



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then I'd continue!"

He added, "I aggravated my knee injury and, when I do the quad toe, I need three, four minutes to recover from the pain. Therefore, we decided not to do the quad today. It was either doing a programme without the quad or not competing, and I want to finish this competition...."

"For me, it is about finishing this competition, having surgery and rehab and then doing new programmes. My motivation is the Olympic Games in home country, in Sochi."

Evgeni skated his Free performance second in the last group of six, delighting the sell-out crowd who packed the stadium only for the Men's final – and he delivered.

He did everything his fans hoped for, opening with quad toe and two triple Axels, the second combined with a triple toe. He also presented a triple loop, triple Lutz-double toe-double loop and a second triple Lutz.

His only negative came on a triple Salchow to double Axel sequence. Two of his spins were Level 4. The other spin and his circular steps were Level 3. The judges even gave a scattered ten +3 maximum GoEs.

His FS gave him a new Personal Best of 176.52 points. "I'm so happy with my performance," he said, "because I did the whole programme clean. I did the quad and I skated with big emotions."

Like a real Plushenko! It is my seventh title and I wrote a little bit of history.

"I am proud of myself. I decided yesterday in the practice that I was going to do the quad no matter what! The audience deserved to see me try my very best."

Artur had by far the event's most difficult routine, which was set to *Interview with a Vampire*. His first four moves were a quad toe-double toe-double loop, which earned 13.40 points, followed by a much better (+1.86) second quad toe, and two triple Axels, the second one combined with a double toe.

However, he stumbled out of his triple loop, none of his moves were Level 4, and the final combination spin was only Level 1.

Nevertheless, he was pleased to get silver. "I landed two quads in one routine for the first time. I got my season's best score. To come second in my second Europeans is a big step forward for me."

Performing to Memories of Sobral, named after the town in Brazil where he was born, Florent Amodio, the defending champion, finished 5<sup>th</sup> after the Short. In the Free, he gave an up-and-down showing beginning with a double instead of quad Salchow. A late Axel attempt turned into a single, but he earned 11 of the maximum +3s – one more than Evgeni – and his FS total of

155.70 gave him 234.18 points overall, pulling him up for the bronze.

Michal Brezina of the Czech Republic, placed sixth in the SP after a fall on the quad Salchow, but fourth in the FS moved him up to fourth overall.

His teammate, 2008 European Champion, Tomas Verner, lay third after the SP after two-footing the landing on his quad toe. In the Free, he fell on the quad toe, and also messed up two jumping passes in the second half of his programme, giving him sixth for the Free and fifth overall.

Florent's teammate, Brian Joubert, has medalled every year he has entered this event 2002-2011, except this one. "Today I messed up three jumps," he said after the Short, laying in 10<sup>th</sup>. "In the Free I have eight (jumping passes). I am a little bit lost. I think the same thing may happen again."

Proving him prescient, Brian again botched three jumping passes but finished 8<sup>th</sup> in the FS and overall.

In the closing gala, the Organisers recognised Evgeni as the star he is and he was given the Position of Honour, performing last of the gold medallists in Sunday's Exhibition programme, which brought the 2012 European Championships to a successful close on Sunday afternoon.

The judging panel for the men's event included British judge, Patricia Houghton.

## European Championships ladies, continued from page 25

In her Free, she drew to skate last of the 24 competitors and performed to music from *Sunset Boulevard*. Everything went fine in the first half, but her triple flip – which looked to the audience to be fairly cleanly landed – was downgraded. Her final jump, a triple Salchow was also deemed under-rotated.

Viktoria was the only competitor to receive Level 4 for her step sequence (straight line which earned +1.20). Her spins were all Level 3 or 4 with + GoEs. The audience applauded her performance enthusiastically, and booed soundly when her marks and final placement were posted.

She finished with 160.82 and was fifth in both sections and overall.

Ksenia Makarova is the 19-year-old daughter of Russian pair skaters, Larisa Selezneva and Oleg Makarov, the 1988 Olympic bronze medallists, who currently live and teach in New York State.

Ksenia returned to Russia after becoming the Russian national

champion in 2010. Although she has not been able to retain her title, those who beat her are still too young to enter this event.

Both opening jump passes in her SP received negative GoEs, and her flying sit only Level 1, but her other called elements (two spins and the steps) were all Level 3 with +GoE, and she took third place in the short, only 0.41 ahead of Elena.

However, she dropped to 6<sup>th</sup> overall with her Marilyn Monroe-themed FS. She finished 7<sup>th</sup> in the FS, skating to the song, Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend, dressed in a strapless pink dress with pink elbow-length gloves.

Although she didn't fall, she landed forwards on her opening triple flip and she lost marks on her combination of two triple toes and her triple-double-double combination. However, her layback was a lovely Level 4 with an extra full point, and she got the audience applauding for her final move, a Level 3 +0.71 combination spin.

Ksenia finished with 159.59 overall,

less than a point ahead of teammate, Alena Leonova, with 158.78.

Alena, 21, was taking part in her fourth European championships. She finished fourth in her debut in 2009 and 5<sup>th</sup> last year. In the last World Championships, she was fourth.

However, in Sheffield, she just didn't have the right spark. She was unlucky to be sixth in both sections, but end up seventh overall.

In the SP, the second jump of her opening combination was downgraded and she received only Level 1 for her flying sit and Level 2 for her combination spin.

Though she lay sixth, she was just over three points shy of third place and hoped to pull up in the Free. However, in her FS, she fell heavily on her triple Lutz. Four of her other jumping passes received negative GoE and she singled an Axel, but she made a concerted effort to finish on a high note and received +GoE for her final three elements – two spins and her steps, which were all Level 3 or 4.