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Kayne, O'Shea take reign as U.S. pairs champions

Scimeca, Knierim lose title, settle for silver; Castelli, Tran claim bronze

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Tarah Kayne and Daniel O'Shea threw down the best free skate in the history of the U.S. championships since the advent of the international judging system, totaling a national-record 142.04 points for their performance of their 'Phantom of the Opera' routine. The pair, which trains in Ellenton, Florida, won their first U.S. title with a score of 211.65, also a new standard for pairs in this country. -Sarah S. Brannen

On the day Tarah Kayne underwent surgery to repair a torn labrum in her right hip, she spoke with her coach, Jim Peterson.

"He said, 'We are one day closer to a clean program,'" Kayne said.

That conversation took place on July 28, 2014, and ever since then, [Kayne and her partner, Daniel O'Shea](#), made it a point to reach the goal of performing a clean program.

Eighteen months later, the duo stood on top of the podium at the [2016 U.S. Figure Skating Championships](#) as pairs champions.

And yes, they skated a clean program.

They brought the crowd at the Xcel Energy Center to its feet, scoring 142.04 points for their free skate and 211.65 overall, marking a new U.S. record. Kayne and O'Shea topped last year's champions, Alexa Scimeca and Chris Knierim, by 14.85 points.

"We worked so hard," Kayne said. "Anyone who knows us personally probably could see this coming. In some ways, with my physicality, it doesn't seem like it would have happened, but if you push yourself, anything can happen."

"I don't think anyone can understand the intensity of the rehab," O'Shea added. "Anyone can do normal training."

Not everyone can put out a program like they did in Saint Paul.

Kayne and O'Shea were the last to compete in the segment, and they had the crowd in the palm of their hand from start to finish. Skating to "The Music of the Night" from *The Phantom of the Opera*, the pair skated with a combination of power and lightness, in addition to grace, when needed. Aside from their Level 2 twist, they were solid throughout, earning a nearly full slate of positive Grades of Execution (GOEs) and Level 4s.

When the scores were announced, Peterson's mouth dropped open, and Kayne's eyes began to fill with tears.

"Because of the hip surgery, we all really had to learn patience," said Peterson, who coaches the duo in Ellenton, Florida, along with Amanda Evora and Lyndon Johnston. "It has literally taken us 18 months. I am so proud of them. Beyond skating well, they skated with heart."

Kayne and O'Shea earned an automatic berth to the world championships, and Scimeca and Knierim are expected to join them in Boston.

Marissa Castelli and Mervin Tran, who were hoping for a spot on the world team, finished third (179.04).

Kayne and O'Shea admitted that they wondered how they would handle the nerves of the free skate after winning the short program.

"The day between the short and long program, a little bit of doubt creeps into your mind," Kayne said. "You think, 'I just had this awesome short program -- am I going to be able to follow it up?' With this program, I can definitely follow it up. I believe in this program so much that any doubt I had right when the music came on was gone."

Although the routine's music has been used quite a bit over the years, Peterson was able to get Kayne and O'Shea to believe in it.

"They were able to see the magic in it," Peterson said.

And so did the audience.

"We were very happy with everything we did out there," O'Shea said. "A lot of goals achieved in that. Nothing can beat the feeling when you get off the ice."

Peterson said the duo spent a couple of days before Champs Camp working with Tamara Moskvina, the famed Russian pairs coach, and she helped with the finetuning of the program. Peterson saw Moskvina when Kayne and O'Shea placed fourth at the Rostelecom Cup in Russia.

"The Russians look at every nuance," Peterson said. "Tamara and I talked, and she said we were improving, and we took that as a high compliment."

Between now and worlds, Kayne and O'Shea will continue working on a quad throw that they plan to add to their arsenal. A year ago, the team placed third at the U.S. championships, just missing out on the world team.

Now they will get to compete in their first worlds, and it will be on home soil.

"I love Boston and nationals there (in 2014) were so magical," said Peterson, whose team at the time, Felicia Zhang and Nathan Bartholomay, came in second and earned a spot on the Olympic team in Sochi. "And my first worlds were in Los Angeles (in 2009). I know how welcoming and fun it is to have worlds at home."

Scimeca and Knierim, the first U.S. pairs team to qualify for the Grand Prix Final since 2007, had their struggles throughout the event. They opened their free with a quad twist, but he fell on their side-by-side jump combination and she put her hand down on the landing of a throw triple lutz.

"It was much improved from the Final, and that was one of our goals," Knierim said. "It's still not up to where it needs to be or can be. We'll step up from this."



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