

The Strong & the Brave Skaters go for glory of National Title

By Laura Reid
Photos by Heidi Klum

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The future of figure skating in Singapore has never looked brighter, as evidenced by the calibre of skating seen at the 4th National Figure Skating Championships held over two days in early March. Events across the board were hotly contested as skaters vied for a gold medal and the glory of a National title.

Guest of Honour at the Medal Presentation and Parade of Champions was Brigadier General George Yeo, Minister of Foreign Affairs. B-G Yeo presented the medals to the top three winners in each event. During his speech, he confessed that he had been surprised to learn that skating was undergoing a revival.

B-G Yeo later told SISA President Lim Chee Kiat that the Singapore skaters looked very natural and "look to the ice like fish to water." On hand to see the skaters for themselves were B-G Gary Yeo (RET), Singapore Sports Council Chief Executive Officer Oon Jin Teik and SSC Chief of High Performance Dr. Toh Kian Lam.

And what a renaissance they saw! Registration for the Nationals was up almost 100% year on year, with about 60 skaters taking part in 2005. As Singapore's only official Olympic Winter sport, ice skating has had to overcome scepticism about climate and the sport's relevance to Singapore. "People didn't believe it was possible for us to produce good skaters in such a hot climate," says Mr. Lim. "And yet, our skaters are getting better every year, and looking at our current numbers for the National Championships, we feel vindicated."

"Skaters in Singapore are actually farther ahead of a number of developed nations in skating, thanks to the competitive drive of these children," adds SISA director of training & development Andrea Derby. "They are driven to train hard and they want to be No.1"

The biggest barrier to Singapore's entry into international skating is the lack of an Olympic size rink. "Without a proper rink, they're like an Olympic swimmer, training in a wading pool," says Ms Derby, who is an internationally trained skating judge. Singapore is fortunate with its good coaches, she says, but if the skaters do not get a rink, they will not catch up to the world leaders in skating.

In the meantime, though, Singapore's skaters are giving the sport their best shot. The number of skaters in the entry level pre-preliminary category was up dramatically with a total of almost 30 skaters entered in the A (under 11 years old) and B (11 years & older) events. Many skaters were competing for the first time at Nationals, an indication that more people are taking up the sport on a competitive basis, as opposed to pure recreational skating.

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