

# Figure Skater Ando Lifts Japanese Spirits

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It took Japan's Miki Ando just four minutes to boost the spirits of her devastated nation after she unexpectedly glided to gold at the World Figure Skating Championships.

Japan was forced to relinquish hosting rights of the event following the catastrophic earthquake and tsunami on March 11 that killed at least 13,000 people.

Ando, however, made sure that Japan left its mark on the 2011 championships when she surged past early pace setter and Olympic champion Kim Yuna with a dynamic, if not perfect free skate, to win her second world title Saturday.

"Maybe I was able to bring back a little smile to the people of Japan," said the 23-year-old, who could have won her second title on home ice had the championships not been relocated from Tokyo to Moscow because of the disaster. "I'm so happy to win this gold medal. I did it for myself and for Japan."

Canada's Patrick Chan, who finished second at the two previous world championships, seized

his chance and soared to his first global men's title by earning the highest-ever score.

Russia was also hoping to strike gold on home ice and end a recent medal drought in a sport it had dominated for most of the past two decades.

With former world and Olympic champion Yevgeny Plushenko serving an indefinite ban from competition, the host country's hopes were pinned on 17-year-old Artur Gachinsky. The blond Muscovite, who bears a striking resemblance to Plushenko and is coached by his mentor, Alexei Mishin, did not disappoint a near-capacity crowd at the 14,000-seat Khodynka arena to take bronze on his world championships debut.

Ukraine-born Tatiana Volosozhar and Maxim Trankov won silver for Russia in the pairs competition behind the German duo of Aliona Savchenko and Robin Szolkowy.

While Ando's victory was emotional, Meryl Davis and Charlie White became the first American couple to capture the world ice dancing crown.

With two podium places on the final day, U.S. skaters moved ahead of Russia at the top of the overall world championships table with 183 total medals to 182.

The Russians still lead with the most golds at 75.

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