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# Lipnitskaya Emerges as New Ice Darling

By The Moscow Times

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Fifteen-year-old Yulia Lipnitskaya finishing her skate for the Russian figure skating team in Sochi on Sunday. **David Gray**

SOCHI — Russia claimed its first gold medal at the Sochi Olympics on Sunday but might have won something even bigger after unveiling a budding superstar who could achieve something the politicians have failed.

At just 15, Yulia Lipnitskaya has announced her arrival as the new darling of women's figure skating by helping Russia win gold in the inaugural team event.

Perhaps more importantly, the diminutive 1.57-meter tall Lipnitskaya has provided a skeptical outside world with one of the faces of the Games.

If her performances in the team events are any guide, Lipnitskaya is headed for superstardom. The figure skating world fell in love with her when she won the European Championships last month and now the rest of the world is finding out why.

In just two days, she has gone from a virtual unknown to one of the most searched names on the Internet through her breathlessly enchanting displays on the ice and endearing smile.

Even in the U.S., where the media have been highly critical of the Sochi Olympics, American hearts are melting, thanks to Lipnitskaya, whose performances have helped generate record television figures.

The U.S. has its own new figure skating darling — the delightfully named Gracie Gold — and even she is smitten with Lipnitskaya.

"She is dynamite. She is completely unfazed," said Gold, who is only 18 and picked up a bronze medal in the team event.

"She has no spine, but she has iron in her bones. She goes, ding, ding, ding."

Lipnitskaya is taking all the plaudits and attention in her stride, smiling for the cameras and politely answering all the questions asked of her.

"I do not know how to explain the feeling I had out there," she whispered. "I am very happy to have helped win the first gold medal for Russia."

Lipnitskaya looked like a veteran when she took to the ice, landing all her jumps as the crowd at the Iceberg rose to their feet in adoration. While she might have looked composed, she admitted she felt some butterflies, however.

"I got nervous in the middle of the program, I am not sure why, it is completely unlike me, so the jumps were not great in the second half," she said.

"I did not feel totally comfortable. The jumps did not feel like mine at that point. I would not say I got tired, but some errors still crept in. But even with some flaws it was OK."

Lipnitskaya became the youngest gold medallist in figure skating for 78 years, less than a month after she became the youngest woman to win the European individual women's title.

Suddenly, she is emerging as one of the favorites to win the individual Olympic title, which will start in 10 days' time.

Before then, she plans to return home to Moscow to train at her usual rink, away from the Olympic spotlight that will shine even more brightly on her as soon as she returns.

"I will be preparing there because we are used to that," she said.

"We are not getting too much ice time here, so my coach and I decided it will be better to go back to Moscow.

"We are quite set up here, it will be easier to go back and come here again later."

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