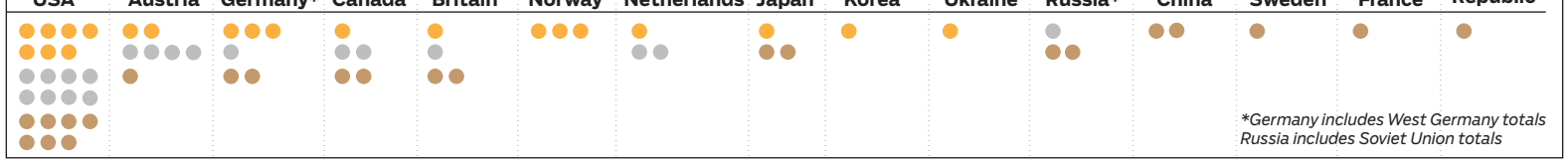
Evolution of women's figure skating

By Ellen Collier, Jennifer Prandato and Kori Rumore | Tribune Graphics

The U.S. has won more figure skating medals in the women's singles competition than any other nation with 22 total, seven of them gold. The championship lineage stems from Sonja Henie, a three-time gold medalist from Norway who later moved to the U.S. and gained fame. Now, some 80 years later, the U.S. is without a clear favorite to make the medal stand in Sochi. Below is a brief history of the fashion, athletes and skating leading into the women's short program on Wednesday.

WOMEN'S FIGURE SKATING MEDALS BY COUNTRY



*Germany includes West Germany totals
Russia includes Soviet Union totals

WOMEN'S MEDAL WINNERS BY OLYMPICS

	Gold	Silver	Bronze
1924 Chamonix, France	AUT	U.S.	GBR
1928 St. Moritz	NOR	AUT	U.S.
1932 Lake Placid, N.Y.	NOR	AUT	U.S.
1936 Garmisch-Partenkirchen	NOR	GBR	SWE
1948 St. Moritz	CAN	AUT	GBR
1952 Oslo	GBR	U.S.	FRA
1956 Cortina d'Ampezzo	U.S.	U.S.	AUT
1960 Squaw Valley, Calif.	U.S.	NED	U.S.
1964 Innsbruck, Austria	NED	AUT	CAN
1968 Grenoble, France	U.S.	GDR	TCH
1972 Sapporo, Japan	AUT	CAN	U.S.
1976 Innsbruck, Austria	U.S.	NED	GDR
1980 Lake Placid, N.Y.	GDR	U.S.	FRG
1984 Sarajevo, Bonsia and Herzegovina	GDR	U.S.	URS
1988 Calgary, Canada	GDR	CAN	U.S.
1992 Albertville, France	U.S.	JPN	U.S.
1994 Lillehammer, Norway	UKR	U.S.	CHN
1998 Nagano, Japan	U.S.	U.S.	CHN
2002 Salt Lake City, Utah	U.S.	RUS	U.S.
2006 Turin, Italy	JPN	U.S.	RUS
2010 Vancouver, Canada	KOR	JPN	CAN

'20s

THE FASHION

Athletes compete outside, so layers and coats are worn. Almost all dresses are made with sleeves.

THE ATHLETES

Beatrix Loughran wins silver in the 1924 Games and bron in 1928. She goes on to secu the silver medal in the pairs competition in 1932.

THE SKATING

Jumps originally don't include

'30s

Henie

After winning her record thir Olympic gold medal in 1936, Norway's **Henie** moves to California and stars in films and ice shows. Of Henie, 196 Olympic champion Carol He said, "She made skating, especially women's skating."

Albright

'40s

Due to fabric rationing in World War II, skirts become shorter.

Barbara Ann Scott is the first and only Canadian to win a gold medal in the women's individual event in 1948.

'50s

Collars begin to disappear, sleeves go from full length to 3/4 sleeve and bright colors are a trend. Skirts still sit close to the waistline, and the costumes look like normal dresses.

Tenley Albright overcomes non-paralytic polio to become the first American woman to win an Olympic figure skating title in 1956. She goes on to a career as a Harvard-educated doctor.

Fleming

'60s

Skirts become more drop-waisted and small decor is sewn onto costumes. Stretch fabrics such as spandex are created due to high demand in sports and swimwear. Skirts continue to shorten.

Peggy Fleming's chartreuse dress is a highlight of the first Olympics broadcast in color. She is the only U.S. gold medalist at the 1968 Grenoble Olympics. She is the first skater since Henie to have a huge commercial appeal, headlining ice shows and doing TV commentary.

In 1960 the compulsory figures change from six to five figures, but they still count as 50 percent of the score.

'70s

Hamill

1976 champion **Dorothy Hamill's** wedge 'do quickly becomes the most copied hairstyle in the U.S. In 1993, Hamill ties with 1984 gymnastics champion Mary Lou Retton for first place in an Associated Press poll of the most popular athletes in the U.S. Michael Jordan is third.

The short program is introduced in 1973, and figures are reduced to 40 percent of the score.

'80s

Skirts are extremely short and full, resembling layered tutus.

Witt

Debi Thomas and **Katarina Witt,** both world champions, skate to music from Bizet's "Carmen." East Germany's Witt wins gold in 1998, Thomas of the U.S. bronze. Witt is the only woman other than Henie to win more than one gold medal.

The Calgary Games are the last to include a separate figures aspect of judging. The backspin position is created by crossing feet during jumps instead of keeping them parallel, making it possible for skaters to complete jumps like triples and quads. A triple axel is first landed in an international competition by **Midori Ito** at the 1989 world championships.

'90s

There is a transition to evening gown styles with thinner fabric and cutouts when Vera Wang designs **Nancy Kerrigan's** costume.

Nancy Kerrigan is clubbed in the knee in an incident involving competitor **Tonya Harding** seven weeks before the 1994 Games. The women's event finishes in a controversial victory by 16-year-old Ukrainian orphan **Oksana Baiul** over Kerrigan. **Kristi Yamaguchi** wins gold in 1992. **Tara Lipinski** wins the 1998 gold medal at the age of 15.

Lipnitskaya

Kerrigan

The short program is counted as 1/3 of the score, while the long program counts as 2/3.

'00s

Michelle Kwan withdraws after one practice in 2006 in Turin. It is her unofficial retirement from competition, leaving the sport without a female star in the U.S. for the first time in 50 years. The 2002 gold medal goes to **Sarah Hughes** of the U.S.

In 2002, the International Skating Union replaces the 6.0 judging system with the international judging system, taking advantage of new technology.

'10s

Sleeveless costumes are a trend, as many skaters become hot if they wear sleeves. Skaters are discouraged from wearing costumes with more than 50 percent of the front using nude or sheer fabric.

Gracie Gold and **Ashley Wagner** are standout U.S. skaters in this year's individual event, but focus has been on 15-year-old Russian competitor **Yulia Lipnitskaya,** who helped her team win the gold this year. All will have to overtake Japan's **Mao Asada** and Korea's **Yuna Kim,** the gold and silver winners from the Vancouver Games.

Wagner
Gold

SOURCES: Jo Ann Schneider Farris, U.S. Figure Skating double gold medalist/coach; Gail Johnson, costume designer/designed for Gracie Gold; Jan Longmire, costume designer/designed for Ashley Wagner; Dianne De Leeuw, 1972 Olympic silver medalist; International Olympic Committee; Sochi2014.com; United States Figure Skating Association; Tribune reporting

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