

## Skyliners set pace in juniors, take two other titles

Chicago Jazz in second; Fond Du Lac Blades, Lexettes battling for third

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Skating to a medley of Michael Jackson songs, the Skyliners jumped in front of the junior competition with a 70-point short program. -Jay Adef

The Skyliners were impressive Thursday at the [2016 U.S. Synchronized Skating Championships](#) in Kalamazoo, Michigan. The Skyliners junior team holds the lead after the short program, while the Skyliners juvenile and intermediate teams took home titles on the first day of competition.

### Junior

After their juvenile and intermediate counterparts each won titles earlier in the day, the [Skyliners](#) junior team performed a personal-best rendition of of their Michael Jackson-themed short program.

Scoring 70.00 points, the Skyliners were exquisite, gaining all Level 3's or higher, including a Level 4 block pivoting and Level 4 wheel traveling element.

"All year, I feel like this program has had so much potential, but they hadn't really delivered it yet in competition," coach Josh Babb said. "I told them [before the competition] to go out and trust what they do every day, and they did. This is the result of all of their hard work and focus. I'm happy for them."

Holding a 5.41-point lead headed into Friday's free skate, Babb said it's important to keep focused.

"Each day is totally separate. We did a great job tonight, but Friday is a new day," Babb said. "They have to come back and fight like they're behind."

Skater Victoria Clarke echoed her coach's sentiments.

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### INSTAGRAM

"We're a confident team but now we do need to do it again [on Friday]. We don't want to get a big head," Clarke said. "Obviously, it's exciting to see how we did tonight and we feel good about it, but we need to stay focused. We can't get distracted."

Chicago Jazz sit in second after earning 64.59 points for their short.

"Our goal was to break 60, so 64 is good," coach Lisa Darken said. "They'll sleep really well tonight and be happy to wake up tomorrow. This is a team that has put in a lot of hard work."

"This is definitely a confidence booster, but we need to stay focused," skater Bailey Styzinski said. "It's not over until it's over. We need to skate our best and stay confident in our program."

The Fond Du Lac Blades are in third after scoring 50.59 points, while the Lexettes sit fourth with 50.47 points.

### Intermediate

The Skyliners picked up the SC of New York's second synchronized title of the day, winning the intermediate division after a 65.00-point free skate in a routine highlighted by a Level 4 line and a Level 3 intersection.

"This was a great way to end the season," coach Pamela May said. "It's a great learning experience for coach and for skater, because they have to get used to me and what I expect. But they're like sponges. They took in everything we taught them and they're fabulous. They were so eager this year and they can't learn enough."

"Our goal was to get to [the U.S. Synchronized Skating Championships] and to be close as a team," team member Angela Mercurio said. "To be out there skating our best, skating the program that we love and having the best season we could have ever asked for is an amazing feeling."

Capital Ice Chips earned the silver after scoring 61.83 points.

"I think it went pretty well," coach Becky Gallion said. "There were a couple little things that happened, but it's [U.S. championships], so it takes some time to get your legs under you."

Despite an early fall, the Ice Chips put together a strong performance, which included a Level 4 rotating wheel, Level 4 line and a Level 3 intersection.

They skated an Olympic-themed program which portrayed the Olympic journey.

"We start out as the Olympic dream and we build as we're working for it," skater Hayley Bortke said. "At the end of the program, we're there -- we've made it."

Team Ashburn skated to bronze after earning 60.33 points.

Having to count a fall, the team from Washington FSC earned nearly six points for its intersection element early in the program and closed with a Level 4 line and Level 4 rotating wheel.

"I think they did a great job today," coach Jennifer Cherry said. "They had a little stumble at the beginning that rattled them a little bit, but then they held it together and had a clean skate the rest of the way."



"As they moved forward, you could see the confidence building and the facial expressions coming out."

Teams Elite finished fourth with 59.20 points.

## Juvenile

The Skyliners, who were the final team to take the ice in the juvenile competition, won with eight first-place ordinals. The Skating Club of New York juvenile team skated to a Dolly Parton medley and earned eight top finishes and one third-place finish.

"I knew they going to be something special when the season progressed, and we started doing better than we ever hoped or dreamed for," coach Natalie Martello said. "To win, when we really just were hoping for the best when we put this team together, is a really wonderful feeling.

"[Before the competition] I told them, 'This is our bonus round. Go skate for the moment and enjoy it,' and that's what they did tonight."

The Skyliners returned just three skaters this season.

"It was amazing. The team has come so far since the beginning of the season, and we shined today," Jillian Belluck said. "We did our best."

Teams Elite took home the silver medal, earning a five second-place ordinals or higher. Set to music from Beyoncé, they skated to "Countdown," "Get Me Bodied," "Run the World" and "Single Ladies."

"I'm very happy with how they skated," coach Danielle Ostrower said. "They've battled a lot this season, so to come out and do a great skate is exactly what we asked for.

"We were trying to be fierce and fabulous and bring all of the character that they have off the ice onto it. This is probably the sassiest group of girls I've ever met, so I thought Beyoncé would be a perfect choice for them."

Chicago Jazz finished third with six third-place ordinals or higher, skating a Coca-Cola themed program,

"It's everything we were hoping for," coach Kristi Frank said. "They have come so far [since the beginning of the season]. This has been a fabulous team to work with. They're all so positive and they have great energy."

The Mini Mates, last year's juvenile champions, won the pewter medal with a 7/4 majority.

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