

Star Ball Professional Ballroom report by Stephen Hillier MBE

1st Alessio Potenzizni and Veronika Vlasova, Russia. Alessio is such a showman and great to watch. They had bags of confidence and conviction to win this very important Championship. They blend their use of power and subtlety very well to create an interesting performance. They danced a very nice Viennese Waltz, and their Tango and Quickstep are first class. I must also compliment Veronika on her wonderful dancing. Congratulations on securing this great Championship.

2nd Vladislav Shakov and Ekaterina Popova, USA. They just managed to arrive in 2nd place after a close battle with the 3rd and 4th placed couples. They received every mark from 1st to 6th, and in the individual dances W T VW F Q they were placed 2 6 1 4 2. They are a very attractive couple with good style and a quality of movement that confirms their very good technical ability. Some adjudicators had them to win while others were marking them 6th. I must say that this can happen with adjudicators having very different opinions, and I admit that I also found them very difficult to assess.

3rd Rudiger Homm and Katia Kanevskaya, Germany. They finished with the following places, 4 2 5 2 3. They are another couple who are difficult to assess. They dance with their own style (which is good), but I see it as being heavy. I feel they should investigate some small changes to the hold, and try to be more flexible with body contact. If they can develop in this way I would be very happy.

4th Mark and Olga Elsbury, England. They finished with 3 4 2 3 4 in the individual dances. They were unlucky with this result but they did not dance at their very best, and this effected Olgas poise. However, they have such quality of movement and style which could result in much higher placings in the future.

5th Iaroslav Bieliei and Liliia Gladiuk, USA. I really like the look of this couple and they are now very experienced competitors. I noted that they had a very good start to their Tango, and generally they used their upper bodies and their head weight very well. I can see that Iaroslav drops his hip line slightly on many line figures, and generally could benefit from a stronger use of that area of the body.

6th Gianni Caliandro and Arianna Esposito, Italy. They danced really well all day and must have been disappointed with this low placing in the final. They are very good in all departments and I thought Arianna was one of the best ladies on the floor. I saw them as dancing with better timing – light and musical – softer and more flowing. They were unlucky to finish in 6th place.

Into the semi-final were the following couples.

7th Sergey Sutyurin and Natalia Sazhina, Russia. This is a wonderful partnership. I made many complimentary remarks about them during the day. They have power without force. So their weight connection is very good. They had some wonderful pieces of choreography in the foxtrot, and their quickstep was light, with speed and wonderful harmonious movement. For me they were a certainty for a high place in the final.

8th Go Hashimoto and Keiko Onda, Japan. I have never seen this couple dance better. I noticed a real improvement in their posture and the way they used their head weight. They are the Japanese Champions and must have been pleased with this performance but disappointed with the result.

9th Jack Beale and Natalia Beale, England. Now one of the top couples in England, and they are improving all the time. They have good style and movement, and are slowly getting more weight connection to the floor. I think their biggest problem now is the co-ordination between the legs and the body, as this will effect how the feet work. I thought Natalia danced very well and more freedom through the right side of the body from Jack would help her even more.

10th Kenji Moriwaki and Miku Matoba, Japan. I was pleased that this couple made the semi-final and it was well deserved. They have danced very well recently, and are finalists in all the major events in Japan. They are beginning to use their body weight, and this is adding more power to the movement.

11th Damiano Soldati and Laura Fox, England. They danced really well, and in the semi-final were at their very best. I can see that Laura is a wonderful dancer. They are improving all the time, and they have an amazing Quickstep. If they can continue in this way they they will have a terrific future.

12th Marek Klepadlo and Nina Yana, USA. They did very well to make this high level semi-final. I found them best in foxtrot, which suits their long legs, and free swing. I noticed some funny choreography in Tango so I would get that checked out. I also notice that Nina was a bit held and stiff in all dances. They have a lovely personality and look as if they really enjoyed their dancing, so overall, well done.

Star Ball Amateur Ballroom report by Stephen Hillier MBE

1st Igor Reznik and Mariia Polishchuk, Ukraine. This couple are really beginning to impress the adjudicators and the audience. They have a very good chemistry together, and fantastic co-ordination, so it all looks so easy. They move like the wind and have very few weaknesses, so they are making it difficult for the other couples to beat them. They are also prolific competitors, so they are gaining experience fast. I see a bright future for these two very talented dancers.

2nd Sicheng Li and Liis End, China. Both Sicheng and Liis are super talented, and have no problems dancing extremely difficult choreography very well. This has its advantages, but as the adjudicators are limited in the amount of time they have to judge, they do not always have time to appreciate these little gems of genius. The full use of feet and legs is a pleasure to see, and I look forward to seeing if Sicheng can produce a more relaxed look in his whole body in the future.

3rd Nikita Druzhyenin and Virgginie Primeau, Canada. They impressed me more and more as the competition went on, and the final was their best round. This makes me think that they may have slight lead and follow difficulties when the floor is busy. I think they could examine how they achieve body contact and a freer approach could be to their advantage.

4th Michal Le and Sandra Jablonska, Poland. I really enjoy watching these two dance. They epitomise the new developments in Ballroom Dancing, and have been doing so for some time now. They are not perfect... 'yet', and Michal still over dances some actions which creates distortion in the bodies. For them it is totally free, and released. They produce a fullness of movement and swing, and rotation, and rise and fall which is very difficult to condemn. In my opinion they have been under-marked for the last few years, and only now have they improved to a level that cannot be ignored.

5th Ilya Golovchenko and Kristina Bogoslavskaya, Russia. Ilya is a very lucky boy, as he has found a wonderful partner in Kristina, and what a difference this has made to his ability to dance. This just goes to show that every talented man needs a very talented lady. Their Waltz was particularly free flowing with good weight release and expression, and this produced great power and quality movement. I noticed an ugly left hand in Tango, but not in the other dances. I predict a very bright future for these two.

6th Maciej Kadlubowski and Maja Kopacz, Poland. I could not see this couple as being last in this final, and can assure them that they were 'very close' to being the best. I really liked them as they have an almost perfect hold, and style. They also have exceptionally good technique. Their timing and musicality is wonderful to see, and their choreography is a delight. So, we must ask what is missing? It is not much, I can assure you! The ability to get out of you, what is inside you, is the final challenge of all great artists.

Into the semi-final were the following couples.

7th Krzysztof Maka and Agnieszka Osrodka, Poland. I have only positive memories of their dancing. The lady wore gloves with long sleeves. This is unusual today but was very popular in former times. Their Tango was excellent with good style and an effective hold. In VW they were first to start, so good tactics. They are developing very well, and it was a shame they missed the final by just one mark.

8th Iurii Prokhorenko and Mariia, Ukraine. They are a lovely couple, and also started quickly in VW. They are very talented, and the young lady is a beautiful dancer. They are on the right track to great things in the future.

9th Dima Dakhnovski and Anna Dakahnovska, Ukraine. They are also very talented. They have a good hold and powerful movement, with excellent technique. Keep working on these important principles and I am sure you will continue to improve.

10th Roman Sukhomlyn and India Phillips Bullock, England. I was very impressed with Roman and India. They danced with a lot of feeling and expression, coupled to this they have big powerful movement, a combination that can produce great results in competitions. India has improved so much, and if you keep dancing like this you will really begin to harmonise. I look forward to watching their progress in the future.

11th Linghao Kang and Anran Xing, China. Like many of the Chinese couples, they are very well trained, and are very well rehearsed. They had a good hold and so created an elegant style. I liked them! If they could develop more power with the same lightness they will have much better results in the future.

12th Ivan Iacobbe and Ylenia Dalla Bona, Italy. They are a lovely couple and normally dance with great feeling and expression which I like very much. However, on this day Ivan looked too strong and stiff in his upper body, and this caused a few problems with the freedom and movement. Ylenia still managed to dance well even with this restriction. I am sure they will do better next time.

Having just watched and made notes from these two great Championships, my mind wanders back to former years when the Star was connected to the United Kingdom Championships, and was called the Star United Kingdom Championships. On the 7th April 1964 I entered the Juvenile 2 dance contest, and was lucky enough to win. Raymond Root and Francis Spires won the Junior 4 Dance event. My mother took a 8mm film on a wind up camera, and I still have a copy on a Video of the dancing at that time. It is so different from today, it almost looks like we were not really trying to win, just dancing the steps.

The development of Ballroom Dancing since those days has been so great and relentless that I feel honoured to have been a part of it. I realise that the English style which was first developed by our early pioneers was a beautiful thing, and made Ballroom Dancing the most popular pastime in the World. We are all benefiting from their endeavours, and we should remember them. However, if holding onto the past delays progress then I feel it may be time to let go of these memories and look at the wonderful dancing we see in front of us today and rejoice in its artistry and beauty.