

Lysacek-Plushenko showdown was snakes and sizzle

By **LEANNE ITALIE**
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

It was a tight — and very stretchy — showdown on Olympic ice for Evan Lysacek and Evgeni Plushenko.

In the end, Lysacek's snakes alive beat out Plushenko's sparkly, red sizzle during the frosty Olympic showdown sartorially dubbed "La Cage aux Folies" by one insider.

Two bulky serpents of Swarovski crystal bounced around the American's neck and up the back of his Vera Wang one-piece. "Thank you, Vera," Lysacek offered as he sweated out his winning scores Thursday night.

"The tall, raven-haired Lysacek cut a riveting figure on the ice," said InStyle magazine's fashion director, Hal Rubenstein. Were the snakes too much? "A bit too heavy in close-up, but striking on the ice."

Still, the look was tamer than Lysacek's costume for the short program, another Wang piece in all black with sequins up top and long, bushy feather cuffs. Lysacek called that one his favorite.

Nick Verreos, the "Project Runway" alum and red carpet designer, said Lysacek and his King Cobra buddies were "dark and dramatic" — and definitely gold medal-worthy.

Plushenko's tight unitard with a red vest design left the fashionistas cold. Same for Jef Billings, a longtime skating designer who has dressed Peggy Fleming, Michelle Kwan and Sarah Hughes for competition.

"How odd that the one skater who gracelessly questioned the masculinity of any competitor who was not going to attempt a quad in their long program should hit the ice dressed like the master of ceremonies at a drag club," Rubenstein said. "If there is ever a version of La Cage aux Folies on ice, Plushenko is ready for rehearsal."

Verreos called Plushenko's outfit as he earned silver a "High School Musical" costume that matched his 'High School Musical' performance."

More spin on the big skate from our experts:

JOHNNY WEIR

Weir went home without a medal, befitting his "fallen angel" theme of silvery crystals in a toned-down look — at least by Weir standards.

Rubenstein: "With a style and manner unlike any other figure skater, if Weir wanted to appear otherworldly, he succeeded."

Billings: "I'm sure the design had a significance to Johnny since he always attempts to convey some idea in his clothes but not sure it was evident to the audience."

Verreos: "I'm happy, and I'm sure PETA is, too, that Johnny lost the fur. It showed his elegant restraint and maturity mirroring his almost flawless performance."

NOBUNARI ODA

Japan's Nobunari Oda, evoking Charlie Chaplin's silent "Little Tramp," could have used a costume assist when one of his skate laces broke loose.

Verreos: "Can you please give me a couple sequins?! I get the Charlie Chaplin reference but I was falling asleep until the lace snapped. Never before have I been so excited about a wardrobe malfunction."

Rubenstein: "You need to hit the ice looking commanding, not adorable."

Billings: "I like that it was not enhanced with beads, etc. Just the essence of the original done a bit simply and adapted as a costume that could be skated in."

DAISUKE TAKAHASHI

Takahashi, also from Japan, won bronze in bland checks with matching wraparound scarf.

Rubenstein: "The vested checked shirt gave the vibrant skater the air of the guy who walks into a room knowing who and what he wants. But the untucked shirt at times appeared a little sloppy on the ice, and at times seemed in conflict with the clarity of his jumps. Next time, Takahashi should tuck himself in. He can look cool after he wins."

Verreos: "Cirque de Soleil gone wrong. ... I give Takahashi points for always bringing us over-the-top costumes, but this one looked like a tablecloth from a cheap Greek taverna."

Billings: "It was a bit distracting because there was a lot of extra fabric pieces flying around. The folded scarf around his neck was a bit overpowering for his small frame."

PATRICK CHAN

Canada's hope placed fifth as he went for "Phantom of the Opera."

Rubenstein: "Stuck somewhere between a band uniform and a double-breasted tuxedo, Chan's costumed betrayed the one trait a skating costume shouldn't project — discomfort."

Verreos: "Although the 'Phantom of the Opera' has been done one too many times for my taste, his costume was a refreshing twist on an overused theme. And, thank goodness, no Andrew Lloyd Weber mask in sight!"

Billings: "The jacket seemed a bit restrictive and perhaps some of the detail was lost."

STEPHANE LAMBIEL

He was in fourth place for Switzerland in flowing shirt sleeves under a vest with lace that flapped at the shoulders.

Verreos: "The Swiss may be famous for their couture laces and embroidery, but Stephane's Tea Cozy shoulder pads were a definite miss."

Rubenstein: "Maybe it's the big shock of hair atop his handsome face and frame, but Stephane tends to favor costumes that make him look like the romantic hero in a ballet, opting for military jackets with lots of buttons and braided shoulders, or cinched vests worn over Jerry Seinfeld's puffy shirt. It makes him look dashing if a little foolish."

Billings: "Slight period detail which was appropriate to the piece of music. Nothing unusual but it did the job."

Syracuse big men dominate in 95-77 win over 'Nova

By **JOHN KEKIS**
AP SPORTS WRITER

Rick Jackson scored 19 points and Arinze Onuaku had 17 as Syracuse's two big men dominated the second half, helping the No. 4 Orange rout No. 7 Villanova 95-77 on Saturday night before an NCAA on-campus record crowd of 34,616.

Syracuse (27-2, 14-2 Big East) improved to 7-0 against ranked teams and clinched at least a tie for the Big East title. The Orange also own the tiebreaker because of the victory over the Wildcats (23-5, 12-4), who have lost three of their past four.

On a day when the top two teams in the nation — Kansas and Kentucky — both lost, the Syracuse win could move the Orange to No. 1 for the first time since 1989-90. They were 11th in the final AP poll of the 2002-03 season when they won the national championship.

With Syracuse stars from the past back for a reunion — Derrick Coleman, John Wallace, Billy Owens and Rafael Addison among them — and the fans waving orange towels donated by the Jim and Juli Boenheim Foundation, the Orange took charge in the second half.

Syracuse increased its 10-point halftime lead to a bulging 72-56 as the 6-foot-9, 260-pound Onuaku converted consecutive follows and the 6-9 Jackson slammed home a

feed from Andy Rautins.

If anybody didn't think it was Syracuse's night, they had to be convinced when Onuaku converted a bank shot off the glass after getting knocked to the floor and completed the three-point play for a 16-point lead with 8:54 left.

Kris Joseph and Scoop Jardine each scored 16 points off the bench for Syracuse, Wes Johnson had 14 and Andy Rautins finished with 12 points and eight assists.

Scottie Reynolds led Villanova with 16 points, Corey Fisher had 14, Antonio Pena 13 and freshman Mouphtaou Yarou a season-high 13.

The Wildcats had won six of the previous eight games against Syracuse, including 92-82 in March 2006, when the previous attendance record of 33,633 was set in the final home game of former star Gerry McNamara.

Rautins, who missed his first three 3-point attempts, opened the second half with a 3 from the wing and Johnson followed with another that countered a three-point play by Corey Fisher.

Jackson hit a hook in the lane and converted a layup off the glass off a feed from Rautins to give Syracuse a 56-48 edge at 16:38.

After a follow by Mouphtaou Yarou, Rautins drained another 3, this one from the top of the key, and after Reynolds missed a wide-open 3 from the left corner, Onuaku converted two follows off missed 3s by Rautins to boost the lead to 65-52 with 12:03 left.

The Orange's big men then put the game away.

The Wildcats didn't seem fazed by the raucous crowd. Reynolds hit a pair of open 3s and a three-point-play by Fisher helped stake 'Nova to an early lead. A 3 from the top of the key by Corey Stokes gave Villanova a 23-14 edge midway through the first half.

But the Syracuse zone gradually became more aggressive and the openings disappeared. 'Nova missed six straight 3-pointers and scored only one basket in a span of nearly 6 minutes.

Villanova entered the game averaging 25 points a game from its bench, but Syracuse reserves Scoop Jardine and Kris Joseph combined for 21 points and keyed the comeback.

Five straight points by Jardine and a pair of free throws by Johnson gave Syracuse a 46-36 halftime lead.

Villanova shot 31.4 percent in the opening half and 27.8 percent from beyond the arc.

The Wildcats rebounded from consecutive losses to Connecticut and Pittsburgh with a 74-49 victory over South Florida on Wednesday night. Villanova's first two-game losing streak in two years had dropped the Wildcats behind Syracuse in the conference standings.