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Everett on skating's road to the Olympics

Skate America will bring many of the world's best figure skaters to the city in 2008.

By [Jim Haley](#) and [David Chircop](#), Herald Writer

EVERETT -- The world's eyes will be on Hewitt Avenue next year as the best figure skaters on the planet take to the ice for a three-day Olympic-style competition.

Comcast Arena at Everett Event Center was selected to host the 2008 Skate America championships, local officials and U.S. Figure Skating announced at a press conference Tuesday.

The timing, just ahead of the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, B.C., bodes particularly well for spectators who should get a rare chance to see intense competition.

That's because participants with gold-medal Olympic dreams will be putting their best skates forward as they use the event to bolster their standings and capture the attention of international judges.

"The road is short -- 120 miles and 16 months are all that separate these skaters from the 2010 Olympics," said Laura Lee, co-founder of Production Sports, the Mountlake Terrace-based company that is organizing the event. "In figure skating there's really a lot of posturing. It doesn't start when you get to the Olympics. You'll see the elite of the elite. The same skaters that will be at the Olympics will be here."

It's too early to say who will compete at the event.

Still, there's a good chance the Olympic silver medalists team of Tanith Belbin and Ben Agosto will be looking for a comeback, and young Californian figure skaters Caroline Zhang and Mirai Nagasu will also make an appearance.

Some 60 athletes from 15 nations are expected to perform in the internationally televised event at Comcast Arena at Everett Events Center.

The event is expected to bring thousands of visitors and produce up to \$2.6 million in local tax revenue, Snohomish County Council chairman Dave Gossett said.

Skate America is scheduled to begin Oct. 23, 2008, with practice for the skaters. Competition will begin on Oct. 24, a Friday, and continue through that weekend.

Skate America is considered the kickoff event for next year's international skating season, which in the U.S. this year started earlier this month and runs through March 2008.

It features competition in women's and men's singles, pairs and ice dancing.

Production Sports co-owner Steve Baker said Everett won the competition partly because Snohomish County put up \$100,000 in hotel tax revenue to promote the event.

Community support for the competition and the fact that the Everett Silvertips and Everett Home Show shuffled their schedules enabled booking the 10,000-seat arena for Skate America, Baker said.

Athletes will stay at the new 370-room Tulalip Resort Casino, which is expected to open in June 2008.

The Skate America event kicks off six major events in the world of competitive figure skating.

"We are extremely pleased to award this competition to Everett," U.S. Figure Skating President Ron Hershberger said in a statement. "The many athletes and visitors to the city will be pleased with all it offers."

Reservations for weekend all-session ticket packages begin today, and range in price from \$125 to \$245. The all-session package includes all competitions, practice sessions and the finale, the "Exhibition of Champions."

It's much too early to tell who will be competing in Everett, U.S. Figure Skating spokeswoman Scottie Bibb said. The competitors probably won't

be announced until summer, she said.

"It's a long and big process determining which of our skaters compete in international competition," Bibb said.

This year's Skate America will get under way this week in Reading, Pa. It is the first of six preliminary International Skating Union rounds to determine who will be involved in a championship round, this year in Italy.

The preliminary competitions are held every year in the United States, Canada, China, France, Russia and Japan.

Past champions include five-time world and nine-time U.S. champion Michelle Kwan, 2002 Olympic bronze medalist Timothy Goebel, 2002 Olympic pairs champions Jamie Sale and David Pelletier of Canada, 1992 Olympic champion Kristi Yamaguchi and 1984 Olympic champion Scott Hamilton.

NBC has a four-year contract to broadcast Skate America, and more than 100 international print journalists and foreign TV networks are expected to cover the event.

Local sponsors include the Tulalip Tribes, Snohomish County Economic Development Council and the Snohomish County Tourism Bureau.

Lee with Production Sports said Everett is an intimate venue, especially when the glass and nets used for hockey come down.

"There will be a sense of power and energy in Everett," she said. "It's emotional, it's intense, it's something even a person who is not a skating fan would be excited to see."

Ticket information

Reservations for 2008 Skate America all-session packages begin today at noon. All-session packages will cost \$125, \$199 and \$245, depending on location of seats. The packages admit people to practices, all afternoon and evening competitions and the finale, the Exhibition of Champions.

Single-session ticket prices for 2008 Skate America start at \$20 and will be available next spring at the Comcast Arena Box Office. Tickets can be charged by phone at 866-332-8499. Patrons also can go to www.comcastarenaeverett.com to download an order form.

Group discounts are available by calling 425-322-2635 or 425-322-2609.