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Tennell's triple jumps guide her to junior ladies lead

Rydberg, Serafini neck-and-neck in second and third; Lin places fourth

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Bradie Tennell's lead isn't quite as big as the name of the song she skated to -- "Infinity" -- but the Illinois skater will take a six-point advantage into Friday's free skate. Tennell executed a top-notch triple toe-triple toe combination to score 59.38 points in the short program. -Jay Adef

It didn't take [Bradie Tennell](#) long to say what pleased her most in her short program.

"The triple-triple," she said, displaying a grin from ear to ear. "I think that was it."

Tennell opened her short program with a triple toe-triple toe combination followed by a triple Lutz, giving her the lead entering the junior ladies free skate Friday at the [2015 U.S. Figure Skating Championships](#).

Tennell came away with a score of 59.38 for her short to "Infinity" by the Hungarian pianist and composer, Balasz Havasi. She is 6.04 points ahead of second-place [Paige Rydberg](#) (53.34). Olivia Serafini is in third with 53.24 points. Each of the top three ladies landed clean triple toe-triple toe combinations.

"I just felt really confident with my skating and I had a lot of fun out there," said Tennell, who was the second skater to compete in the competition and drew the eighth spot for the free skate.

What pleased Tennell's coach, Denise Myers, the most, however, were the high components scores, most of which were in the high six and sevens.

"I was really pleased with that," said Myers, who coaches Tennell at the Twin Rinks in the Chicago suburb of Buffalo Grove. "Since sectionals, we have worked a lot on components, and we saw the results here."

What both Tennell and Rydberg hope to improve on in the free skate is their levels in the step sequences. Tennell received a Level 2 for her sequence, while Rydberg was hit with a Level 1.

Still, the two were overall pleased following the first part of the competition. Tennell, who finished fourth at the U.S. championships last year in Boston, hopes that the short program was just a sign of things to come in the free skate. She turns 17 on Jan. 31 and a junior title would be a good early birthday present.

Rydberg, who was the second-to-last skater to compete, is making her first trip to the U.S. championships at the junior level and said she enjoyed every minute of performing in the Greensboro Coliseum, the largest arena in which she has ever skated.

"I remember when I was in intermediate and I was sitting in Omaha at nationals watching the senior ladies in the big arena," said Rydberg, 15, who won the novice silver medal last year. "I thought, 'Oh wow, this is where I want to be.'"

"Well, she finally made it to the big arena," added her coach, Mary Antensteiner,

Rydberg lives in Plainfield, Illinois, and trains just eight miles down the road at a rink in Darien, Illinois. She said she is looking forward to seeing some of the top senior skaters compete, especially Gracie Gold and Jason Brown, who spent much of their careers training in Illinois. Rydberg skated on the same ice as Gold on occasion when Gold trained with coach Alex Ouriashev.

Like Tennell, Rydberg was most pleased with her triple-triple.

"I came here to skate as clean as possible and be happy with my program," said Rydberg, who wore an off-white and teal dress and skated to music from the movie, *Out of Africa*. "I landed the triple-triple and thought that was just amazing."

Rydberg has not had an easy road to the U.S. championships, as financial hardships have impacted her family. Her mother, Theresa Koris, works 12-hour days with before-and after-care programs to help support her daughter's skating. Rydberg said she was excited to recently land sponsorships with Edea skates and Paramount blades.

Serafini, wearing a bright purple costume and skating to "Bombay Dreams," showed a marked improvement from her eighth-place showing at the U.S. championships a year ago. Since then, she moved from her native New York to California to train with Rafael Arutunian, the same coach who guides Ashley Wagner, Adam Rippon and Nathan Chen. Earlier this season, she earned a bronze medal at the Junior Grand Prix in Bratislava.

"She came to me around May," Arutunian said. "It's just a matter of time. She's a good skater and we have been working on her technique."

Amy Lin, who placed sixth last year at the U.S. championships, is fourth after skating her short program tango, and Sarah Feng, who is making her junior debut at the U.S. championships, is in fifth. Like the top three skaters, Lin attempted a triple toe-triple toe combination, but was cited for under-rotation



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