‘Blade Angels’

The death of the ‘ice princess’ in figure skating

By EMILY MARQUIS
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“Powerpuff Girls.” “Babes of Glory.” “Blade Angels.”

Whatever you call the trio of figure skaters representing the U.S. in the women’s singles category at the 2026 Milano-Cortina Winter Olympics, it is undeniable that the trio of Amber Glenn, Alysa Liu and Isbeau Levito is redefining the image of women’s figure skating in a way the sport has desperately needed.

Figure skating, like any sport, has a complicated, scandalous history. Whether it be within the institution itself, corrupt judges and backroom deals, or through the atypical, sometimes harmful training of young girls, women’s figure skating often has faced a perception problem.

Yet that perfect picture of the elite “ice princess” winning gold might be in question this Olympic cycle.

It begins with the eldest of the three skaters, the three-time reigning U.S. figure skating champion Amber Glenn.

Glenn is an atypical skater from first glance. At 26-years-old, she’s considered a veteran in the skating world, still maintaining quality components and a consistently clean triple axel in her program.

For figure skaters, particularly in the women’s discipline, maintaining high-level jumps into your 20s is unheard of. For viewers who may have watched the 2022 Beijing Olympics, whispers of the 3As — Alena Kostornaia, Anna Shcerbakova and Alexandra Trusova — and the “Eteri expiration date” of 18-year-olds highlights Glenn’s longevity well.

In the figure skating world, making your senior debut over a decade before making your first Olympics is uncommon. The last gold medalist, Shcerbakova, has not skated in national or international competition since winning the medal.

As the first openly queer woman to represent the U.S. in singles figure skating, Glenn’s openness about her sexuality and beliefs has put her on notice beyond her ice skating and age. Unafraid to speak out, the skater understands that her position as a top athlete comes with a platform, and she’s unafraid to use it.

Despite receiving hate for speaking out against the Trump Administration and its treatment of LGBTQ+ athletes, Glenn remains outspoken and unabashed in her beliefs.

In the caption of a TikTok Glenn posted Feb. 10 after helping lead the U.S. to Olympic gold in the team event, the Texan skater was clear about how she felt about those criticizing her comments.

“They hate to see two woke bitches winning.”

The other “woke bitch” in question?

Twenty-year-old skater Alysa Liu.

Liu, like Glenn, draws eyes with her skating and distinct aesthetic. Her style, which media outlets and Liu herself have called “alternative,” is apparent at first glance. Liu’s smiley piercing and striped hair separate her from the rest of the skaters upon first glance.

In a sport where a single rhinestone falling on the ice can result in a point deduction, that difference is more than a defiance: it’s a risk.

Furthermore, Liu is redefining what skating can be. Remember the “Eteri expiration date?” Within it, 18-year-old ice skaters under infamous Russian coach Eteri Tutberidze are unable to continue skating after turning 18 because their bodies and minds simply won’t allow it, forcing retirements from international competition.

But Liu retired even earlier.

At 16-years-old, Liu competed in the Beijing Olympics and 2022 World Championships before retiring, ending a moderately successful figure skating career. She fit the bill of a typical skater, blending into judges’ expectations.

At 19, she returned.

However this wasn’t the same Liu who fit the standard of a perfect “ice princess” prototype. Liu’s skating reflected herself. Part of the reason the skater retired in 2022 was to live a normal life, and that new view of figure skating — as a choice and an artistic expression — is reflected in her public persona.



ILLUSTRATION BY LILIANA MIRABELLA

In every interaction with the media, there is a palpable excitement from Liu because she’s making her own career decisions. In an interview with “60 Minutes” on Jan. 4, she highlighted how this return is on her own terms.

“If I feel I’m skating too much, I’ll back down. If I feel like I’m not skating enough I’ll ramp it up. No one’s going to starve me or tell me what I can or can’t eat,” Liu said.

It’s an individuality that hasn’t always been synonymous with success at the top of judge sports, particularly women’s single figure skating.

Even for Levito, whose exterior exudes the typical “ice princess” persona that has traditionally dominated the sport, her support of the other “Blade Angels” has been unwavering and frankly unique amongst competitors in the field.

Longtime figure skating fans may remember the controversy between 1994 U.S. Olympic figure skaters Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan. Although the attack on Kerrigan weeks prior to the Olympics stole the spotlight from the rivalry, a major divide between fans of the two skaters was their skating styles and presentation. Harding was known for her jumps, similar to both Glenn and Liu, while Kerrigan’s artistry, technique and “ice princess” appearance captured judges’ attention.

It would be easy for Levito to use that division between artistry and athleticism to advance her own case for a medal, or at least foster rivalry between her competitors.

But judging from the reported “Blade Angels” group chats and the countless TikToks lauding the competitors’ support for one another, Levito isn’t keen on pushing any such narrative.

It’s all love from the U.S. women’s single skaters. Glenn and Liu have already secured gold medals in the team event. As for the individual discipline, in which the entire trio of “Blade Angels” will compete together for the first time, the opening short program performance is set for Feb. 17 at 12:45 p.m. Medals will be awarded after the free program on Feb. 19.

The effect of the Washington Post pulling the plug on its sports department

By ANTHONY ANGELILLO
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On Feb. 4, The Washington Post laid off roughly a third of its newsroom and dismantled its sports department in its current form. The purge also eliminated the books desk, cut staff photographers and narrowed both Metro and the paper’s internal footprint, underscoring that this is bigger than sports.

For a paper that helped shape sports as a daily essential, the move reads less like a tweak and more like a redefinition of what the Post believes core journalism is and what it’s willing to leave behind.

The Post has been under severe financial pressure as it tries to survive a subscription-driven digital model in an era of short attention spans.

Leadership wants to call these cuts a strategic rest, but the bullshit is all over the walls, showing where the Post's priorities lie in journalism.

Combine that with the tension of having to accept major losses, including $77 million in 2023, and the decision not to endorse a presidential candidate in 2024 led to more than 200,000 digital subscription cancellations.

Owner Jeff Bezos publicly defended the move, but the backlash exposed something bigger, with how money, public trust and national identity can collide.

When a legacy newsroom prioritizes one man’s wealth and greed, journalistic independence diminishes, while the person controlling the money sets the principles rather than the public it serves.

Still, losing a sports department feels like the scapegoat that overlooks the problems ahead. Sports coverage is often the most reliable way a paper shows up for readers, and it is one of the clearest places where journalism can wield power in everyday life.

This causes multiple intersections in real time. Money sets the constraints, identity shapes who stays and readers will stop seeing the paper choices as serving the public, leaving in the process.



ILLUSTRATION BY KATERINA PARIZKOVA

So Bezos’s defense of the move as a principled way to counter perceptions of media bias looks even worse, given that the number of people leaving has led to revenue shrinking. When revenue shrinks, the newsroom gets smaller.

Bezos has to look in the mirror knowing his move just cost his own newspaper millions, but don’t worry, he can just wipe his tears away with all of his Amazon money.

The Post’s Executive Editor Matt Murray said sports coverage would end “in its current form,” with some reporters shifting toward features that treat sports as a cultural and social event.

However, a features-first model narrows the daily report, which comes from consistent reporting, and risks turning coverage of big moments into something that just happens, without the context that explains why these moments matter.

The timing makes the decision feel even colder. Super Bowl week was already in full swing, while the opening ceremony for the Winter Olympics was just two days after the layoffs. This made it feel less like a judgment on sports and more like a boardroom decision that ignored the moments unfolding.

Even at the Olympics, the Post still had reporters on site because travel plans and costs were already in motion.

This all culminated in Post Publisher and CEO Will Lewis stepping down, adding another leadership change to a moment when staff already described the newsroom as shaken. That kind of churn does not rebuild trust inside a workplace, and it does not help readers believe the next plan will last.

For young journalists like me, the lesson is not to panic, but to focus on what journalists can do.

I do not view this as the end of sports journalism, far from it. It is a narrowing of where major legacy outlets think sports belong.

More coverage will move to sites like ESPN, FOX and NBC. Creator platforms and team-controlled media will also be in the mix, and will produce plenty of content, but it will not always produce the kind of reporting that tells the “truth” when it gets uncomfortable.

Journalism is supposed to help people make sense of a country, but cutting the witnesses changes the country people can see. If a newsroom wants to stay essential, it cannot treat a third of its staff like spare change even when Bezos’s billion-dollar ass says otherwise.