

Eurovision Dance Contest – Take(s) Two

The International DanceSport Federation (IDSF) continues its association with the Eurovision Dance Contest (EDC). The second edition of the live 135-minute television spectacular airs on 6 September 2008 (starting at 21:00 h CET) from the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre in Glasgow. Some changes to the rules should level the dance floor for all participants.

2007 saw the inaugural edition of the EDC broadcast live and during prime time hours across Europe. 16 couples representing as many countries had entered the contest. Huge audiences tuned in to watch them perform two routines each – and to determine the winners in true Eurovision style, casting their votes by phone or SMS.

Awarding points on a scale from 1 to 12 to couples other than their own, the television viewers in the participating countries put the Finnish entry Katja Koukkula and Jussi Väänänen in first, ahead of Ukraine and Ireland.

Katja and Jussi performed two Latin dances in the London BBC studio. The Finns showed a Rumba and a Paso Doble to the highest levels of perfection. Expectedly so: they had danced together since the early 90s and made it into the top ten at IDSF World Latin Championships on a number of occasions. Their Paso Doble's choreography and the choice of music – *'The Unforgiven'* by heavy metal cellists *Apocalyptica* – were equally convincing. But then, they had long made choreography and arranging the music as their professional careers.

The runners-up from the Ukraine, Illya Sydorenko and Yulia Okropiridze, boasted similar credentials! Finalists in National Championships, semi-finalists in a number of IDSF Opens, they both held academic ties to DanceSport. Illya graduated from the Kiev University of Culture and Arts with a degree in choreography and direction. Yulia, who had enrolled at the same university, obtained a Master of Sports.

With that much expertise brought to the parquet in 2007, these were tough acts for couples which included social dancers to compete against. And there were quite a few of them: television and sports personalities had paired up with a professional dancer in national contests (of the *Dancing with the Stars* kind) to qualify for the EDC – only to end up at a competitive disadvantage.

Hence the producers of the EDC in agreement with the IDSF made an amendment to the rules for 2008. The national broadcasters are ALL expected to field what is termed a MIXED COUPLE, i.e. a couple consisting of *"one professional dancer and one non-professional dancer"*. The rules define the professional as *"the member of the couple whose full-time activity is devoted to dancing and activities directly associated with dancing (teaching, choreography, exhibitions, competition, etc.)"*. As per the new rules, only the professional dancer needs to be accredited by IDSF.

While selecting a celebrity as the non-professional dancer is strongly encouraged – since it is bound to increase interest in the EDC – it is not mandatory. And most importantly: unlike other televised competitions involving PRO-AM couples, the EDC is not a dance learning platform. Ideally, the non-professional should be a personality “*known in a field other than dance*” – but one who is able to contribute with his or her skills to the performance on the floor.

“The non-professionals make the EDC even more attractive for the viewers through their charisma,” says IDSF President Carlos Freitag. *“Their involvement transmits a very strong message as well: DanceSport is for everyone!”* Freitag expects the new rules to achieve something else.

“These personalities are excellent ambassadors for our sport, inspiring the audiences to give it a try, to take up dancing for its health and social benefits, and then to work on perfecting their techniques.

“Dancing together with a talented pro can launch a novice on the steepest of learning curves and make him or her perform at stunning levels after a short but intensive training period. I am certain that we will witness superb dancing by actors, singers ... and by athletes who excelled in other sports already.”

It does take two to tango! In this year’s EDC the two will have somewhat different backgrounds when it comes to their careers in dance, but they will help promote the sport to new audiences.

– ENDS –

International Dance Sport Federation

The International DanceSport Federation (IDSF) is the sport’s world governing body recognised by the International Olympic Committee. The mission of IDSF is to regulate, administer and develop DanceSport for the benefit of millions of athletes at every level and on all continents. IDSF has 84 National Member Federations.

IDSF Websites

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