

Recitation E

Gutsy Performance in Sochi

One of Japan's most popular athletes should have known she couldn't leave quietly. Mao Asada's press conference Wednesday to officially announce her retirement from figure skating attracted some 350 journalists and was telecast live across Japan.

Asada had led the country's figure skating scene since her teens with her trademark triple axel. She started skating at the age of five and won world championships in 2008, 2010 and 2014. Her illustrious career also included a silver medal at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics.

Asada, who announced her retirement from her 21-year career on her blog two days ago, occupied a special place in the Japanese sports landscape. Her popularity far exceeded that of other figure skaters, even those with more gold medals.

At Wednesday's press conference, Asada called her performance in the free skating event at the 2014 Sochi Olympics her most memorable.

"It's difficult to pick just one," Asada said. "But the free skating in Sochi definitely stands out."

She placed 16th in the short program in Sochi after falling on her triple Axel, under-rotating a triple flip, and doubling a triple loop.

But in a stirring free skate Asada rebounded, earning a personal best score of 142.71. This made her the third woman to score above the 140 mark after Yuna Kim's 2010 Olympics score and Yulia Lipnitskaya's 2014 Olympics team event score.

It placed Asada third in the free skating and sixth overall. Even though she didn't win a medal, it was a performance that many will never forget.

As for what's next, Asada said she is ready to take a new step in her life and will continue appearing in figure skating shows.

"I have no unease about the future," Asada said. "I want to try new things and keep moving forward in a positive way."

(299 words)