

# TOP PERFORMERS

## ATHLETES RAISE THE BAR AT COMBINES

COMPILED BY DEVIN WANG

It was a busy seventh campaign for S.T.A.R.S., with 17 combines hosted across the country between April and August. Multiple U.S. Figure Skating camps (Jump on It!, Pairs, ISP Singles and two Synchronized Skating DREAM camps) also offered S.T.A.R.S. combines in conjunction, allowing athletes ample opportunities to be tested.

As the program continues to grow and develop, participants likely noticed different tests this season. Balance tests looked similar to skating in a standing spiral position, while the lumbar extension test mimicked the flexibility of the lower-back for laybacks and Biellmanns. S.T.A.R.S. is constantly evolving to ensure that young skaters are physically prepared to handle new, more complex and demanding skating skills.

There is one familiar face who returns as a top performer, and some new faces who participated in their first S.T.A.R.S. combine this season. Five of the new top performers were U.S. Championships competitors and have participated in at least three S.T.A.R.S. combines.



### TOP FEMALE/ FEMALE AGE 11-14

**Ellie McClellan**  
CHAMPIONS' EDGE SC  
NOVICE LADIES

McClellan completed her third S.T.A.R.S. combine with goals of consistently landing her triple jumps, and to someday make it to the U.S. Championships at the senior level in ladies

and/or pairs. "I have always believed that off-ice training is a huge part of success in this sport. It is incredible how much S.T.A.R.S. has taught me over the past few years. I hope to keep improving on my score and overall strength. It is important to me to stay fit through hard work, fitness training and a healthy diet. I know with the help of my coach's and my family's support, this is achievable." She works with coaches John Zimmerman, Sylvia Fontana, Jeremy Barrett and Andrei Kyforenko. Utilizing the feedback from S.T.A.R.S., McClellan's fitness goals are to remain injury free, and keep improving in all areas of fitness, strength and flexibility.



### TOP MALE/MALE AGE 11-14

**Nicholas Hsieh**  
SC OF WILMINGTON  
NOVICE MEN

Hsieh is the 2017 intermediate men's silver medalist, and trains at the Skating Club of Wilmington in Delaware. This was his first S.T.A.R.S. combine, which took place at U.S. Figure Skating's Jump on It! Camp. "Participating in the S.T.A.R.S. combine made me more aware of my physical strengths and weaknesses. My results have inspired me to do more strength conditioning in order to further improve my athletic abilities." Hsieh's on-ice goals are to land consistent triple jumps and do clean run-throughs of his programs even when he is tired. He also spends time off ice working with a personal trainer toward the goal of injury prevention — doing exercises to strengthen his core,

feet/ankles and improve his proprioception. Outside of skating, Hsieh has played the violin since age 5 and is a member of the Philadelphia Young Artists Orchestra. He volunteers as a mentor in the Philadelphia Region Youth String Music Orchestra.



### TOP PAIRS

**Katherina Frantz**  
FORT WAYNE ISC  
JUNIOR PAIRS

Frantz participated in her third S.T.A.R.S. combine, citing that she does S.T.A.R.S. exercises throughout the week and a lot of off-ice training every day. "They help me be a better and stronger skater." She competes in junior pairs with her brother, Nicholas, and in novice ladies, with her goal of being one of the top skaters in her levels. Frantz also likes to run, swim and bike.

### TOP ICE DANCE/FEMALE AGE 15 AND ABOVE

**Kseniya Ponomaryova**  
SKOKIE VALLEY SC  
SENIOR DANCE

Ponomaryova is a senior ice dancer, five-time U.S. Championships competitor, and trains at Fox Valley Ice Arena in Geneva, Illinois. She has participated in four S.T.A.R.S. combines. "This season I am looking for a new partner and I am working hard on perfecting my skating. Off-ice training helps me to be effortless and injury free on ice." Ponomaryova takes ballroom and ballet



lessons to improve her technique on the ice. She would love to show different styles of dance on the ice. Off the ice, she wants to continue working on her balance, flexibility and endurance. Ponomaryova loves photography and traveling to explore new places.



### TOP SYNCHRONIZED SKATING ATHLETE

**Kailey Jungbluth**  
LAKELAND SC  
CRYSTALLETTES NOVICE

Jungbluth has been a synchronized skater for seven years and has participated in S.T.A.R.S. combines since 2014. Outside of synchronized skating, she is working on her novice freestyle and silver dances with goals of passing her novice freestyle and gold dance tests. "S.T.A.R.S. combines help me to build endurance for programs and shapes me into a stronger skater." She hopes to qualify for, and medal at, the U.S.

Synchronized Skating Championships with her team. Jungbluth enjoys playing golf, writing, drawing and baking. She has a goal of making the girls golf team at her high school.



### TOP MALE AGE 6-10

**Wilken Gray**  
FSC OF CHARLOTTE  
PRELIMINARY

Gray participated in his first S.T.A.R.S. combine in Charlotte and is thrilled to be a top performer in his age category. Gray began skating when he was 4 years old, and trains at the Pineville Ice House in Pineville, North Carolina. His workouts include on- and off-ice training with coach Samantha Vonsiatsky, and plyometric training with his personal trainer at the local YMCA. His love for skating is infectious and he trains with a passion for the sport. The S.T.A.R.S. combine allows Gray to evaluate his current training program and plan for the next year. This past year he participated in a Sk8 to Eliminate Cancer event to help fund research for cancer. He loves to play basketball with friends, and his current favorite pastime for relaxation is fishing.

### TOP MALE AGE 15 AND ABOVE

**Caleb Wein**  
WASHINGTON FSC  
JUNIOR DANCE

Wein has participated in S.T.A.R.S. combines since 2013. "Skating is unique in that it is an art and a sport. Many aspects of your fitness influence your ability to perform your best. Over the past years, the S.T.A.R.S. combine has helped me to pinpoint aspects of my fitness I wanted to work on. Once you start working on something and get it better, there's always something else you want to improve." His goal has been to work more on the artistry and performance of his skating and to improve his flexibility, while maintaining strength and stamina in his off-ice



training. Wein plays the guitar, bass guitar and viola. He enjoys listening to classic rock music, painting and sketching.



### TOP FEMALE AGE 6-10

**Sofia Wang**  
SKOKIE VALLEY SC  
JUVENILE

Wang trains with coaches Denise Myers, Sandi Delfs, Shanetta Folle, Jeremy Allen, Vladimir Fedorov and Laura Kaplan at the Twin Rinks Pavilion in Buffalo Grove, Illinois. This is her second year participating in the S.T.A.R.S. combine. Working off the ice with Tom Fischetti and Jeff Schultz, and doing Pilates with Dr. Adam Weiss, she is motivated to improve her results from the previous year and stay a step ahead of her growth spurts. Her goals are to improve her jump height and increase her upper-body strength. Wang enjoys hiking, rock climbing, singing, watching DIY videos, and chatting with friends on social media.