

# GRAND SLAM GRAND FINALE

*The International DanceSport Federation (IDSF) Grand Slam Series concluded its first year of existence with the final event in the Principality of Monaco. The Monte Carlo Sporting Club's 'Salle des Etoiles' – the 'Room of Stars' – was the appropriate venue for the grand finale to the highest-level tournament series under IDSF auspices.*

*Twelve couples each in Standard and Latin had qualified for the all decisive showdown by gaining world ranking points in ten Grand Slam events held throughout the world during 2003.*

*The purpose-built parquet floor was all theirs on December 20. But once the music stopped after the victory waltz, the IDSF, too, was declared a winner.*



IDSF 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President Harald Frahm was commissioned to supervise the Grand Slam on behalf of the board. While his brainchild, the ARD Masters Gala Series, continues to stand out among the properties in dance sport, it also bears strong resemblance to what the IDSF endeavored to create with its tournament series. Ever since the early nineties, Frahm had managed to bring three events annually to sell-out crowds and millions of television viewers in Germany. He had managed to develop a concept of blending elite sport with the splendor of ballroom dancing, filling some of Germany's largest arenas to the last seat and securing unmatched visibility on the ARD (Association of German Public Broadcasters) network. Taking a similar concept to the global level was merely the consequential challenge for Frahm.

Peter Jensen, a former head of sports for the ARD affiliate NDR, assumed the role of professional project manager in charge of Grand Slam 2003 television and marketing. And the IDSF Sports Director, Heinz Spaeker, was to act as the technical delegate for the twelve competitions scheduled between January and December.

Authoritative advice certainly helps to lay a solid foundation to even the grandest of projects. At one point, however, the blueprints are deemed final, the sleeves get rolled up, and the work starts in earnest.

Over the course of recent years, IDSF acquired considerable savvy in marketing some of its championships to broadcasters and sponsors around the globe. Its joint venture with the International Management Group (IMG) resulted in dance sport's exposure to new markets. The continued collaboration with IMG's television branch TWI allowed for valuable experiences to be gained in the production and distribution of dance sport programming. But for the 2003 Grand Slam Series, the pilot edition, the IDSF opted to go a new way: alone.

From setting the purse – 160,000 Swiss francs – and paying it directly to the finalists to shaping the

It started with the official announcement – in October 2002 – of IDSF launching a new tournament series. Born out of the federation's commitment "to serve dance sport athletes worldwide by providing more elite competitions", the Grand Slam Series 2003 was also to improve the adjudication standards and systems, and to assist the athletes in "their personal development" and "in their dance sport careers". An ambitious undertaking! No wonder, IDSF chose to rely on input and guidance by experts from the earliest project stages.

Peter Maxwell – a champion, coach and adjudicator from Great Britain – was won as chairman for the newly established series. His appointment was nothing short of an outright endorsement of the IDSF's course of action in supporting and promoting top amateur dancers. From day one of the series, Maxwell was able to contribute to its success from a particularly valuable point of view: that of a champion and dance sport professional.



## IDSF: EVENT ORGANIZER TELEVISION PRODUCER

The bulk of the highlights programming from the IDSF Grand Slam Series 2003 was produced by public and private broadcasters in the countries where events were staged. In two cases – for the events in Miami and Monaco – the IDSF commissioned its own production teams to cover the sporting action and to get close up with the athletes – on and off the floor.

broadcast coverage, the list of tasks and responsibilities was long. The dip into the federation coffers was hardly avoidable.

Establishing the series' international character required the twelve events to be staged on three continents, and the tournaments to be open to top athletes from all IDSF member nations.

Perennial championship organizers in Europe, Asia and America were selected as hosts to the five International Open Competitions each in Standard and Latin. The individual Grand Slam events were either piggybacked on existing tournaments or packaged: Standard and Latin disciplines were contested in Miami, Moscow and Monaco.

The first Grand Slam event, the International Open Latin in Pforzheim, Germany, was held in January. 115 couples from 22 nations entered. The International Open Standard in Tokyo, Japan, followed in March. Entries: 114 couples from 14 nations. *"The athletes have welcomed this series and documented acceptance through their participation,"* Harald Frahm reported on the series' progress to the IDSF Annual General Meeting in June.

The spectators came by the thousands to the venues, whether it was the Raffles ballroom in Singapore or the Aarhus stadium hall in Denmark, to watch the best dancers perform either a waltz or a jive. Some even selected to take in the sporting action from a floor-side table and over a gala dinner.

The television coverage produced on the 2003 Grand Slam Series aimed first and foremost at providing international audiences with consistent highlights packages. With IDSF either contracting specialist companies for some of the productions or assisting the respective host broadcasters in a hands-on manner, this proved achievable at an early stage too. Right from the premiere in Pforzheim, IDSF specialists succeeded in steadily improving upon the ways elite dance sport was presented to the public in attendance as well as to television viewers the world over.

When it came to concluding the series with the appropriate grand finale, the challenge consisted in going beyond the highest of benchmarks established with ten events during the previous eleven months.

The location – posh Monaco – contributed greatly. Limited entries – the finals were only open to the best twelve couples each in Standard and Latin – added to the exclusivity: *"La crème de la crème!"* The 'Room of Stars' – with its privileged views over the Mediterranean and into the starry night – was the elegant backdrop to the gala.

IDSF pulled out all the stops, dipped even deeper into its coffers, and put on a dance sport extravaganza which did justice to the 48 athletes capable of mesmerizing the crowd of 500 with their duels.

To heighten the drama for these finals, IDSF decided to employ a formula which pitches one couple against another, with a single one-on-one match taking up the entire parquet floor and all of the adjudicators' attention. An identical competition format had previously been adopted for the ARD Masters Gala Series and proven successful with public and television, allowing both to focus on the couples' presentations without distraction.

His Sovereign Highness Crown Prince Albert of Monaco, member of the IOC and patron of the Monegasque DanceSport Association, personally awarded the winning couples with trophies and checks. And the sanctioning body who had turned event organizer received its just reward as well: confirmation of the schedule for the IDSF Grand Slam Series 2004.

*"Particularly the production on the Monte Carlo finals managed to set new standards; and not only due to the tension-building format of the competition,"* Harald Frahm explains. *"Close-ups on the dancers showed faces and gestures, the expressions of tension and joy, which afforded the television viewers with a sense of proximity superior even to that experienced from the best seats at the venue. This gives us the chance to win over new audiences and improve the ratings for our broadcasts!"*

It cannot surprise that the makeup of these audiences is similar to those tuning in to watch figure skating. A prevalence of female viewers and convincing demographics make figure skating stand out among the Olympic sports. Dick Ebersold, chairman of NBC Sports, singles the artistic performances on ice out as *"worthy of airtime on U.S. networks"* – even during primetime hours.

While the 2003 Grand Slam events in Pforzheim and Barcelona were covered to the highest standards by public broadcasters – ARD-affiliate Hessian Broadcasting and Spanish Television TVE – some of the others were produced and aired nationally by sports channels: GAORA in Japan, NTV+ in Russia with excellent results. The August 1 broadcast of the Tokyo event recorded 8 million viewers – through GAORA satellite and cable – in Japan. NTV+ reports highly encouraging shares for its two programs on Standard and Latin disciplines in Moscow as well.

Given dance sport's huge popularity in Germany, one can safely assume that the 2005 Duisburg host broadcaster, ARD-affiliate West German Broadcasting, will feature the tournaments in Standard, Latin and Rock 'n' Roll prominently in its line-up of World Games coverage on July 16 and 17, 2005.