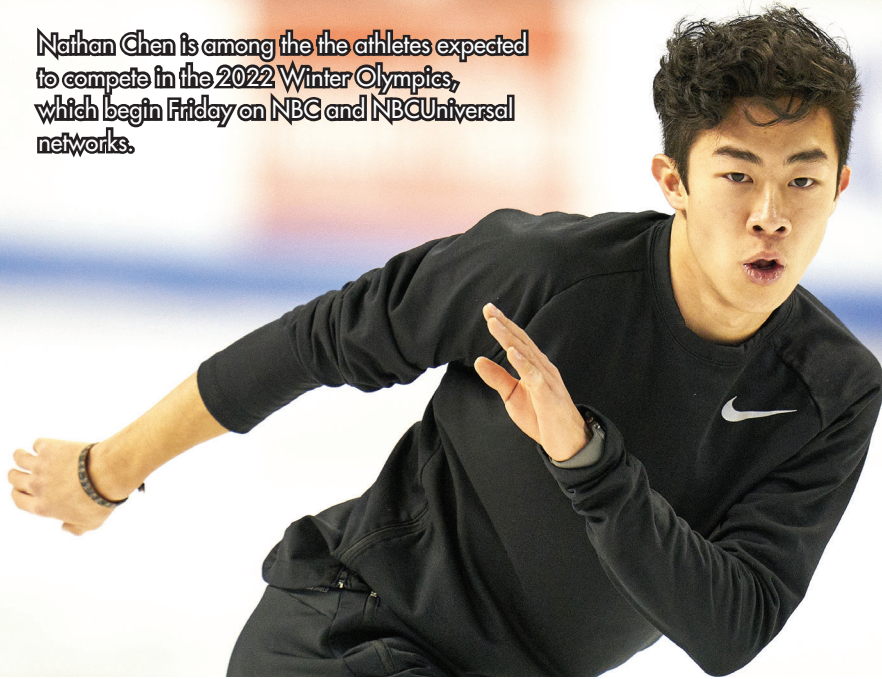


coverstory

BY GEORGE DICKIE

Nathan Chen is among the athletes expected to compete in the 2022 Winter Olympics, which begin Friday on NBC and NBCUniversal networks.



Back to Beijing: Chinese capital hosts 2022 Winter Games

Anyone who tuned into the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing bore witness to an event they wouldn't soon forget.

The four-hour, nine-minute display of special effects, lights and ingenuity set a new standard for an Opening Ceremony and drew raves from international media for being spectacular and spellbinding, a show that no host city has since matched in imagination and magnitude.

Almost 14 years later, the Chinese capital is once again in the spotlight as the host of the 2022 Winter Olympics, which get underway Wednesday, Feb. 2, two days before the official Opening Ceremony on Friday, Feb. 4. NBC, Peacock, USA Network, CNBC, NBCOlympics.com and NBC Sports app will again team up to provide 3,000-plus hours of coverage over 17 days of a record 109 medal events in 15 sports, among them figure skating, alpine skiing, snowboarding, ice hockey, speed skating, freestyle skiing, biathlon and luge.

International athletes expected to vie for hardware at these Games include Mikael Kingsbury (freestyle skiing, Canada), Hanyu Yuzuru (figure skating, Japan), Mikaela Shiffrin (alpine skiing, U.S.), Francesco Friedrich (bobsled, Germany), Suzanne Schulting (short track speed skating, Netherlands), Charlotte Kalla (cross-country skiing, Sweden), Nathan Chen (figure skating, U.S.), Eileen Gu (freestyle skiing, China), Sara Takahashi (ski jumping, Japan), Tina Hermann (skeleton, Germany) and Ester Ledecka (snowboarding, alpine skiing, Czech Republic).

Of course, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic will also play into the storylines as conditions continue to change. For their part, the International Olympic Committee and Olympic organizers have made clear that these Games will go on and the athletes will be subject to strict protocols, including requiring vaccinations, keeping them isolated inside the Olympic "bubble" and not allowing them out among the citizenry.

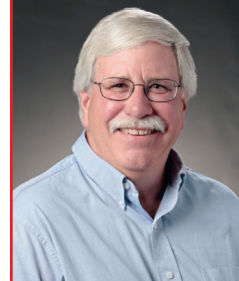
One interesting thing to watch is the performance of athletes from the host country at these Games. China is not known for winter sports and in the lead up to these Olympics have hired international coaches to coach its athletes in hopes of inspiring more Chinese to try skiing, snowboarding, figure skating and other winter sports and thus make the country a more significant presence on the international stage.

As for opening week sports to watch, curling kicks things off on Wednesday, Feb. 2, with the U.S. facing Australia. Women's hockey then faces off on Thursday, Feb. 3, with Team USA opening its defense of its 2018 gold medal with a preliminary contest against Finland.

Figure skating then gets going Friday, Feb. 4, with men's short program, ice dance rhythm dance and pairs short program prior to the Opening Ceremony. And on Saturday, Feb. 5, freestyle skiing makes its first appearance with the final in men's moguls, in which Canada's Mikael Kingsbury will attempt to defend his gold medal from 2018 in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

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