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# Two Chens dazzle at U.S. Figure Skating Championships

By Mike Street  
Special to The Asian Reporter

The future of American figure skating appears to be named “Chen.” At the U.S. Figure Skating Championships in January, the phenomenal Nathan Chen set new world records while dominating the men’s division, while the lesser-known Karen Chen won the women’s side with an incredible performance of her own. Though the two are not related, both are united in their Asian-American heritage — and their fluidity and strength on the ice.

Coming into Kansas City for the championships, Nathan Chen was already well known at the lower levels of U.S. skating. The son of Chinese parents, he had already won the U.S. Championships four times, twice at the novice level and twice at the junior level. But the 2016 season was his first at the senior level, and it started out with a huge leap forward — followed by a shattering step back.

At the 2016 U.S. Championships a year ago, he became the first man to land two quadruple jumps in a short program and four in a free skate, and won a bronze medal. But just hours later, he suffered a hip avulsion during an exhibition skate; the injury left him on crutches for two months, forcing him to miss the World Championships.

By May, however, Chen was rehabilitating, and in November, he won a silver medal at the NHK Trophy competition in Sapporo, Japan, becoming the youngest medallist ever in a Gran Prix event. Chen set a similar mark a month later at the Gran Prix Finals in Marseilles, France, winning a silver medal; he was the second-youngest male medallist ever at that prestigious event.

Coming into the 2017 U.S. Championships, Chen was one of the favorites, especially after 2016 champion Adam Rippon broke his foot two weeks before the event. Chen did not disappoint. He set a new standard in men’s skating by becoming the first skater to land five quadruple jumps in competition, setting new scoring records in the short program, free skate, and total score.

Chen didn’t just set those records; he destroyed them, beating the short program record by almost seven points, the free skate record by nearly 25 points, and the highest total score by more than 43 points. He defeated the second-place finisher by more than 55 points — and that silver medallist is Vincent Zhou, a Chinese American.

With the Winter Olympics just a year away, Chen has become one to watch.



“The U.S. is back on the map at the world stage,” he said after his record-shattering performance. When asked about the possibility of winning Olympic gold, he said modestly, “There’s so much room that I have to improve to make myself at that level, but I think it’s definitely possible.” After coming back from such a difficult beginning to the 2016 season, Chen has shown that he has the work ethic to get

there.

While Nathan Chen’s spectacular performance was not unexpected, Karen Chen wasn’t really on anyone’s radar coming into Kansas City for the U.S. Championships. Most skating fans had their eyes on Ashley Wagner or Gracie Gold, winners of the last five U.S. Championships, Gold being the defending champion.

In 2015, Taiwanese American Karen

**SENSATIONAL SKATERS.** At the U.S. Figure Skating Championships in January, the phenomenal Nathan Chen (top photo) set new world records while dominating the men’s division, while the lesser-known Karen Chen (bottom photo) won the women’s side with an incredible performance of her own. Though the two are not related, both are united in their Asian-American heritage — and their fluidity and strength on the ice. (AP Photos/Charlie Riedel)

Chen made a splash by placing third at the U.S. Championships, but she seemed like a flash in the pan after fizzling the following season. She fought through injuries and problems with her skating boots, trying 14 different pairs throughout the season, and she finished a lowly eighth place at last year’s nationals.

But she put all that struggle behind her at this year’s nationals, starting with a record-setting performance of her own in the short program. Her score of 72.82 was the highest ever for a female skater at the U.S. Championships. But Mirai Nagasu, the Japanese-American skater who won the 2008 nationals, was less than a point behind her, and Wagner trailed by less than two points.

This meant Chen would have to follow her amazing short program with a fantastic long program to ensure victory. Chen did just that, nailing six different triple jumps in an emotional free skate that earned her a 141.40.

“There was definitely a lot of pressure, knowing that I skated the short of my dreams,” she said. “I wanted to follow it up with a close-to-perfect long.” Nagasu and Gold performed poorly in their free skates, but Wagner put on a great show that wasn’t quite great enough: Chen barely edged her out for the victory.

Among others, Chen could thank Olympic gold medallist Kristi Yamaguchi for her support. Yamaguchi first noticed Chen when the 11-year-old was nailing triple jumps at a local rink in their hometown, and she has mentored the younger skater ever since. Yamaguchi encouraged Chen to “just have fun” at the 2012 nationals, when Chen set a novice-level scoring record en route to a gold medal. Later, she sent Chen a congratulatory text shortly after her awesome long-form performance at the 2015 nationals.

Yamaguchi has established a winning tradition that both Chens hope to follow at the 2018 Olympics in South Korea. Nathan’s courageous strength and Karen’s graceful perfection make them formidable opponents in both the Olympics and the many competitions held before then. We will all be watching them with interest to see if they can build on these incredible performances and emulate Yamaguchi’s success.

## 2020 Olympic golf course open to reviewing membership policy

By Mari Yamaguchi  
The Associated Press

TOKYO — The club that will host the 2020 Olympic golf tournament is open to changing its policy to include women as full members, if asked.

The Kasumigaseki Country Club came under scrutiny recently when the International Olympic Committee (IOC) inquired about the club’s membership practice. The issue surfaced in mid-January when Tokyo governor Yuriko Koike urged Kasumigaseki to admit women as full members.

Tokyo Olympic organizers also said they would review the practice.

Kasumigaseki general manager Hiroshi Imaizumi told The Associated Press that the club is currently preparing to provide an explanation to the IOC and International Golf Federation that its member-

ship policy excludes women from fully-fledged membership but not from playing or other types of membership. He said the club has no immediate plan to make changes to the practice because the IOC has not asked it to do so.

If requested, the club said it is open to reviewing its policy for a change and would seek consensus from its more than 1,000 full members, though it may take some time, Imaizumi said.

Founded in 1929 as a private club funded by about 300 wealthy men, Kasumigaseki is one of the oldest and most prestigious clubs in the country and has hosted more top-level tournaments than any other Japanese course.

Within a few years of the opening, the club started accepting female players and has since also added junior members, a

move seen as female friendly in the relatively conservative sport of golf.

The Japan Golf Association said there are a number of Japanese clubs that still bar women from playing.

The club has not received any complaints from its members about the policy, but if the membership practice is seen as problematic, changing the rule is a possibility in the future, Imaizumi said.

“We have always believed our policy has been very open, so we were caught by surprise,” Imaizumi said, referring to the recent media attention over the club’s membership policy. “We welcome all female players and we have no intention of creating a gender barrier.”

To join Kasumigaseki, an applicant needs to obtain a reference from a current member and pay 8 million yen (\$70,800) to

become a regular member first, then pay an additional 4 million yen (\$35,400) to be a full member.

Only full members can play any day of the week.

“Kasumi is an exclusive club that no ordinary people can join and play. It’s a club where women are deprived of full membership, which means they cannot join any decision-making process at the club or even cannot play golf on Sunday,” said Eiko Oya, a journalist and critic who heads the Japan Golf Council, a nonprofit citizens group pushing for a change of venue to Tokyo’s public golf course.

The group said it sent a statement to IOC president Thomas Bach in December to call his attention to the issue, saying the club’s membership policy is “contrary to the spirit of the Olympic Games.”