

Nagasu, Chen, Tennell earn U.S. Olympic figure skating spots

By Barry Wilner
AP Sports Writer

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Mirai Nagasu, Karen Chen, and Bradie Tennell, the top three finishers at the national championships, have been selected to the U.S. team for the PyeongChang Olympics.

Three-time U.S. champ Ashley Wagner, who complained vigorously about the marks after her free skate, was not included. Four years ago, Wagner also finished fourth but was placed on the team ahead of Nagasu. Wagner wound up with a bronze medal in the team event.

“I really took time to remodel myself, because I didn’t want to feel that regret,” Nagasu said during the announcement on NBC’s “Today” show. “This has been about my journey and my goal to get here. To accomplish it last night has been a dream come true.”

Chen, 18, the 2017 U.S. winner, and 19-year-old Tennell, made their first Olympics. Nagasu, now 24, was fourth at the 2010 Games.

Alternates are Wagner (first alternate), Mariah Bell (second alternate), and Angela Wang (third alternate). Only Wagner has been to an Olympics among those three.

U.S. Figure Skating uses a committee to decide the squad, and it went with the results of the national championships. Past performances and a variety of other data are included in the decision.

The remainder of the team includes three men, three ice dance couples, and one pair.

Rising star Tennell’s near-perfect free skate earned her first national crown. Tennell, a long shot entering the season, was spotless in the short program, then as the final skater in the long program, she didn’t miss a trick under tremendous pressure. Her top competitors, Nagasu and Chen, already had put down superb routines.

“I just had to keep calm and focus on what I knew I could do,” Tennell said. “There’s the initial butterflies, but I kind of start to lose myself and keep going.”

“I don’t think it’s sunk in quite yet. I’m still kind of shocked. It’s indescribable to me.”

Nagasu, U.S. champ 10 years ago and a 2010 Olympian, capped a sensationally sweet comeback with a flowing performance to finish second, assuring a spot in next month’s Olympics — a berth she was



SPOT SECURED. Mirai Nagasu is seen performing during the women’s free skate event at the U.S. Figure Skating Championships in San Jose, California. The U.S. champ 10 years ago and a 2010 Olympian, Nagasu capped a sensationally sweet comeback with a flowing performance at the national championships to finish second, assuring a spot in next month’s Olympics — a berth she was denied in 2014 by the selection committee. (AP Photo/Tony Avelar)

denied in 2014 by the selection committee. That position for Sochi was given to Wagner, who had a better overall record.

Chen, the defending champion, was third.

After overpowering the entry and two-footing the triple axel that no other American woman tries, Nagasu hit six triple jumps, including a loop in the final seconds of a stirring program. She was so moved by her performance that she broke out in tears and covered her face, trying to gain control of the emotions that often had betrayed her in critical moments.

She was still crying in, appropriately, the kiss and cry area when the marks showed Nagasu she had shattered her personal best by nearly 20 points with a 213.84.

Chen’s big season last year had not translated into achievement this campaign. She put those struggles to an icy death with a superb showing that had one flaw toward the end. She, too, was overcome by tears for a 198.59 score.

Tennell made it a trio of tears with her career best of 219.51. Tennell announced herself as an Olympic team threat with a third place at Skate America. Hardly ice shattering, but then she ratcheted up everything for nationals.

Wagner had the crowd going for most of her energetic routine, but a flawed lutz as her final jump was costly. She responded to the fans with a deep bow when she finished, yet was shaking her head “no” when her marks were posted.

Hours later, after she verbally campaigned to be placed on the Olympic team again, Wagner was left off.

Nathan Chen dazzles with five quad jumps to win U.S. nationals

By Janie McCauley
The Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Nathan Chen skated once more in a victory lap of sorts, this time to high-five fans as the newly crowned national champion.

Well, repeat champion.

And oh what a lopsided win he delivered.

Chen dazzled yet again with his remarkable athleticism to pull off five breathtaking quadruple jumps, skating the final routine to a commanding U.S. national title.

With improved poise and style that showed all his growth, not to mention his new Vera Wang costumes, Chen beat second-place Ross Miner with a total score of 315.23 — a startling 40.72-point margin.

The 18-year-old Chen secured his spot for the PyeongChang Games with his performance. He opened with a quad flip-triple toe loop combination at full speed and with flair, and never looked back. Chen displayed a new maturity and attention to detail such as pointing toes,

using his head, and being more expressive with his body.

“I still need time to really wrap my head around this,” Chen said. “But this whole season has gone exactly as I wanted it to in terms of all the requirements to make that Olympic team. Honestly at this point in time it is sort of just checking off that box. I still have a lot more to do, but ultimately this is the dream that I’ve wanted for a long, long time. I’ve really strived for it my entire life. And I’ve always wanted to know what it feels like to be on that Olympic team.”

Sporting all black, Chen singled his planned triple axel as his only flaw. It hardly mattered with all those memorable quads. Besides the first combination, he also did a quadruple flip stand-alone, quad toe loop with a double toe loop combination, and a quad toe and quad salchow on their own.

Unbeaten this season, Chen is considered the Americans’ best hope for a medal. The U.S. Figure Skating selection commit-

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As Olympics approach, things to know about PyeongChang

By Foster Klug
The Associated Press

PYEONGCHANG, South Korea — The Olympics are coming to one of the most remote, ruggedly beautiful parts of South Korea, an area known for icy winds, a collapsed mining industry, towering granite mountains that blot out the horizon, and for a tough, proud, rapidly aging population as curious about the approaching foreign masses as outsiders are about the place they’re heading.

With the Olympics just a few weeks away, here are some answers to questions about PyeongChang and the Korean Peninsula:

Question: Is the Korean Peninsula safe?

Answer: Yes, with a half-century-old caveat.

South Korea is one of the safest places in the world to live and visit. People regularly leave their cellphones and bags on restaurant tables when they go to the restrooms.

But it’s also an easy drive to the edge of an incredibly hostile, and nuclear-armed, North Korea. Since U.S. President Donald Trump has begun matching the over-the-top rhetoric North Korea has always favored, there have been worries over the possibility of war. South Koreans, used to decades of threats about turning Seoul into a “sea of fire,” are still fairly nonchalant about the North. The presence of 28,500 U.S. military personnel and a massive amount of U.S. and South Korean firepower aimed at North Korea helps. North Korea’s dictatorship values its existence above all things, and knows that it could not win a war with South Korea and its U.S. ally. This has tempered the threat since the Korean War ended in 1953.

Q: Do people speak English?

A: Not many.

But the government has paid for English lessons for some people in the service industry; there will be translation apps and English-speaking volunteers; phone hotlines are available. Adding to these efforts will be South Koreans’ natural hospitality and curiosity.

Q: Where, exactly, am I going?

A: To a lovely, frigid land of mountains, streams, and clean air. But also to a more temperate, coastal region known for its seafood and beach.

The Olympics are actually being held in three areas: PyeongChang, known for mountains and winter sports; Jeongseon, a blue-collar former mining region; and Gangneung, the biggest of the three Olympic towns by far and a bustling port and vacation area along the Sea of Japan, known here as the East Sea. Together they take up South Korea’s northeast corner, not far from the border with the North. The inland areas have always been isolated, and while sections have been revamped for the Olympics and the coastal areas are well developed, many places are proudly as they’ve always been, which is to say they have little in common with the skyscraper glitz and “Gangnam Style” glamour of Seoul.

That, for many Koreans who visit, is the point.

Q: What can I eat?

A: Korean cuisine is some of the world’s best, a daily joy to explore.

Spicy, pungent kimchi; thick fermented soups filled with meat so tender it falls off the bone; barbecued everything; all of it washed down with ubiquitous soju liquor. While food options aren’t as wide as in Seoul, there are local delicacies, including dried pollack (fish), in stews and grilled; grilled and marinated pork and squid;



OLYMPIC VENUE. People take to the slopes at Yongpyong Resort in PyeongChang, South Korea. The PyeongChang Olympics are coming to a remote, ruggedly beautiful part of South Korea known for icy wind and towering granite mountains. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)

tofu; riced steamed with mountain herbs and some of the country’s best beef.

Q: What’s the weather like?

A: Bundle up.

Gangwon province is one of the country’s coldest places. The wind is brutal, and the stadium for the nighttime opening and closing ceremonies is open air and has no heating system. Locals make it a matter of pride not to complain about daily wintertime life, but visitors risk misery if they’re unprepared.

Q: How will I get around?

A: Just in time for the games, high-speed trains will whisk people from Seoul and the Incheon airport to the area in about an hour, compared to three hours or more by car. Also available: more taxis than usual, 150 free inter-city busses and shuttle busses that connect with major hotels and the local airport. Officials hope to reduce traffic by restricting locals’ car usage. Outsiders driving in can choose from seven parking lots near the Olympic venues, then take free shuttles to stadiums.

Q: What else is there to do in PyeongChang and South Korea?

A: PyeongChang County is famous for winter sports, with plenty of area ski rental shops. Just driving among the massive granite peaks and frozen streams can be breathtaking. For scenic views, try Odaesan National Park and the Woljeongsa Buddhist temple, which offers overnight stays. You can hike Mount Seonjaryeong and visit sheep ranches in the mountain town of Daegwallyeong.

Jeongseon, with one Olympic venue, the downhill skiing course, has the country’s only casino where Koreans may gamble — Gangwon Land. You can pedal “rail bikes” amid the mountains at the Jeongseon Railbike Park, an abandoned coalmining railway track, or walk over a cliffside see-through floor at the Jeongseon Ski Walk on Mount Beyongbansan.

Gangneung has the vibrant Sacheon and Gyodong districts near the city’s famous Gyeongpo Beach and hosts five Olympic venues handling skating, curling, and hockey. The Ojukheon House and Municipal Museum is a well-preserved 16th-century Joseon Kingdom-era house. And Jeongdongjin Sunrise Park arguably provides South Korea’s best mainland sunrise view.

Seoul offers shopping and nightlife in Gangnam south of the Han River. In the north there are Namdaemun’s open air markets and several royal palaces and gardens. A short drive away is the Demilitarized Zone, where soldiers glare at each other across the border, the South Koreans through mirrored sunglasses, as tourists gawk. The always odd mix of Cold War tension and modern tourist trap (the southern side has a Popeyes and amusement park) has gotten stranger since the recent defection of a North Korean soldier. He’s recovering from being shot five times by his former comrades during a dash across the line.

AP writer Kim Tong-hyung contributed to this report.