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Liu's youth, Chen's consistency highlight national skating victories

By Mike Street

Special to The Asian Reporter

In the world of U.S. men's figure skating, one name has reigned supreme in recent years: Nathan Chen. It came as no surprise, then, that he won the U.S. Figure Skating Championships in January for the third year in a row. As he continued his stranglehold on the top men's spot, though, a new name rose to the top of the women's competition. Alysia Liu set several records on the path to her first win at the U.S. championships, and her age and talent foreshadow many more appearances at the winner's podium.

Few doubted Nathan Chen would emerge on top at the U.S. Figure Skating Championships. After all, he was not only the twice-defending champion but also the reigning world champion, having crushed Japan's Shoma Uno by nearly 40 points at last year's event. (By comparison, Uno defeated third-place finisher, fellow Japanese skater Kazuki Tomono, by a little more than six points.)

And last December, Chen won the Skating Grand Prix for the second straight year, part of a season in which he won all three events he entered. He became the first American male skater to win two Grand Prix titles in the award's 23-year history; only two other American men have won the title even once.

More impressively, Chen won nine of his last 10 skating events heading into the championships, failing to take the top spot only in the PyeongChang Olympics last year, when he placed fifth. As if this competitive load wasn't enough, Chen began his freshman year at Yale in the fall of 2018, adding to the substantial pressure on him.

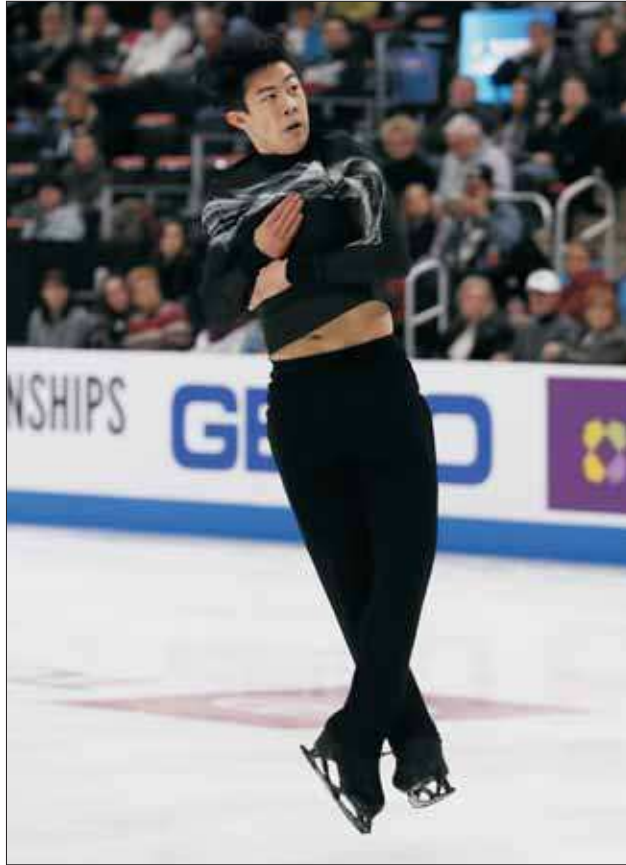
His routine as a full-time student includes ice time at Yale's Ingalls Rink, with his only connection to his coach coming via FaceTime. "There are pros and cons with anything, but I don't mind the training atmosphere I'm in," Chen said. "I'm really grateful that Yale is allowing me to continue skating while pursuing my studies."

Being a full-time Yale student and a full-time skater is a huge task, but that pressure wasn't evident at this year's U.S. championships. In his short program, Chen executed two quad jumps, giving him a good score before the free skate. And in that longer program, he doubled his quad output, starting with a beautiful quad lutz at the beginning that foretold the dazzling performance to come. In his next two moves, he added two more quads, racking up 47 points just moments into his routine.

When he finished his program, Chen had scored an incredible 342.22 total points, this time besting the second-place finisher by more than 58 points. Chen's free skate score alone was high enough to beat the total scores of all but six of the competitors at nationals.

In winning his third straight national championship, Chen became the first American man to accomplish that feat since Johnny Weir in 2004-2006. As long as he can keep up on his Yale studies and his skating, Chen could be in line for his fourth straight title in 2020.

School studies of a different kind occupy the mind of the U.S. national winner on the women's side. Her studies



SKATING SUCCESSES. In the world of U.S. men's figure skating, one name has reigned supreme in recent years: Nathan Chen (left photo). It came as no surprise, then, that he won the U.S. Figure Skating Championships in January for the third year in a row. As he continued his stranglehold on the top men's spot, though, a new name rose to the top of the women's competition. Alysia Liu (right photo) set several records on the path to her first win at the U.S. championships, and her age and talent foreshadow many more appearances at the winner's podium. (AP Photos/Carlos Osorio)

were of the ninth-grade variety, since this year's national champion, Alysia Liu, is only 13 years old. Before this year's nationals, the youngest U.S. skaters to win a national title were Tara Lipinski and Scott Allen, who both won at age 14.

But Liu is used to achieving at a young age. At last year's U.S. nationals, she won the junior division despite being more than a year younger than the next-youngest competitor. And at the U.S. nationals in 2016, she became the youngest intermediate U.S. champion at age 10, thanks to a free skate that included six triple jumps, two performed back-to-back.

Liu built on those impressive tricks at the 2017 Asian Open, becoming the youngest competitor in the world to land a triple axel in competition. At this year's nationals, Liu nailed the three-and-a-half-rotation jump in her short program, but she knew that one triple axel wouldn't be good enough to win a championship.

Then Liu saw her chance. Three top competitors — Amber Glenn, Emmy Ma, and defending champion Bradie Tennell — all skated before Liu, and all fell while trying to land different, less difficult triple jumps. If Liu could nail a triple axel in her long program, the win would be hers.

Like Chen, Liu got her hardest jumps out of the way early, hitting a triple axel right out of the gate in her long program. Not satisfied with just one, Liu landed a second triple axel right afterwards, becoming the first U.S.

woman to land three total triple axels in competition, with two in one program — and the youngest ever to do either.

She finished her long program with a well-earned smile on her face. That smile widened into a gasp of astonishment when the scorecards showed she'd earned a career-best 143.62 score in her free skate, vaulting her into the lead. "When my score came out," she said modestly, "I still thought that it isn't over because there is still one more skater ... I was just happy to beat my personal record."

When that final skater, Mariah Bell, could not top Liu's total of 217.51, the 13-year-old's victory — her first at the senior level — was secured. But her next big victory at the senior level won't be possible until next year's nationals, since she's too young for international competition at either the senior or junior level.

Liu won't be eligible for the senior level until 2022, just in time for the Beijing Winter Games. Like her other successes, Liu takes that pause with characteristic confidence. "I'm not too worried about that part because I get more time to work on my jumps and spins, and just train more and more before I compete against them."

With her prodigious talent, work ethic, and competitive drive, Liu could achieve the victory string that Nathan Chen has put together — or even surpass it. Even if Liu can't match his consistency, she and Chen give Asian-American sports fans a lot to look forward to in figure skating competitions to come.

Honda to shut plant in Brexit-shaken Britain

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would not build a new SUV at its plant in Sunderland, England, as previously planned.

"Car manufacturers have repeatedly warned the government about the threat Brexit poses to British industry," Stadler said, noting that Jaguar Land Rover had also scaled back its operations.

"Honda faces the same challenges as fellow Japanese car maker Nissan. The global economy is slowing down, which has hit key markets such as the U.S. and China."

L. Alan Winters, director of the U.K. Trade Policy Observatory at the University of Sussex, said that the backdrop of Brexit means that the U.K. is less able to respond to challenges in the industry.

"Honda, like all other car manufacturers, has a major problem to solve and having a chaotic government that does not seem to care about industry makes it less inclined to try to solve them here," he said, adding that it will be

difficult for Britain to face the shock. "With Brexit sucking life out of the U.K. economy, it will be much more difficult to find new activities and jobs to compensate for the losses at Honda and elsewhere."

The planned closure will hit Swindon hard. Beyond the jobs at the plant, the jobs of those who supply the plant will also be at risk, as the auto industry has proved to be a bellwether of the economy.

Local lawmakers described the news as devastating and unions pledged to fight for the jobs.

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady put the blame squarely at Prime Minister Theresa May's door, saying her refusal to rule out a Brexit without a deal has put thousands of jobs in jeopardy.

"Workers at Honda must not pay the price for the prime minister playing to the hardliners in her party and we urge Honda to sit down urgently with Unite to discuss a way forward for the plant," O'Grady said.

Haruka Nuga in Tokyo, Elaine Kurtenbach in Bangkok, and Danica Kirka in London contributed to this report.

Free Solo wins the Oscar for best documentary feature

By Beth Harris

The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — *Free Solo* climbed to the top of the Oscars, winning best documentary feature.

The film about rock climber Alex Honnold's quest to achieve a free solo climb of El Capitan in June 2017 was honored on awards night.

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Nepal expects more Everest climbers after China sets limits

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trekkers, but officials are working on plans to minimize the impact.

This is also the last year for climbers who were unable to make attempts on the mountain in 2014 to use their extended climbing permits.

Nepal extended the permits of about 300 climbers for five years. The 2014 climbing season was cancelled after 16 Nepalese Sherpa guides died in an avalanche at the beginning of the season and other guides refused to work.

Directors Jimmy Chin and Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi were challenged by the conditions: filming Honnold without affecting his climb of 3,000 feet of sheer granite and getting sound because he was often too far from the camera.

"This film is for everyone who believes in the impossible," Chai Vasarhelyi said on stage. "It was the work of an army."

The film has grossed over \$19 million worldwide.

Chai Vasarhelyi thanked National Geographic, which made the film, "for believing in us and for hiring women and people of color because we only help make the films better."

In the wings, Chin was speechless as actor Jason Momoa gave him an Aquaman-worthy whoop and bear hug, while Chai Vasarhelyi said "Oh my god, I think I have to cry now."

