

Asians in American sports • Asian Americans in world sports

# Two Asian-American figure skating winning streaks continue

By Mike Street  
Special to The Asian Reporter

Ask your average fan to name the sport Asian-American athletes have dominated lately, and it might take a while before they come up with figure skating. But the 2020 U.S. Figure Skating Championships held at the end of January showed the continued legacy of Nathan Chen, while a rising star on the women's side began a streak of her own.

### Nathan Chen

At that event, Nathan Chen, just 20 years old, became only the seventh American male skater since World War II to win four straight U.S. national titles. Several of them — Dick Button, Scott Hamilton, and Brian Boitano — are well known, although Boitano was the last to accomplish the feat, way back in 1988.

Five of those six skaters also won Olympic gold, an accomplishment that eluded Chen in 2018 the way few other titles have. Chen has won the last three Grand Prix Finals and the last two World Championships, after twice winning both the U.S. junior and novice championships. Winning two straight world championships in 2018 and 2019 made him the first U.S. skater to win back-to-back world titles since Scott Hamilton won four straight between 1981 and 1984.

Chen succeeds with a combination of grace, strength, daring, and technical ability. Along with his many medals and titles, he was the first skater to land six quadruple jumps in competition, which he did in 2018, one year after becoming the first skater to land five different quad jumps in competition.

Chen's life has become more complicated of late, as he now attends Yale, where he combines a tough academic schedule with an uncertain workout schedule conducted without his coach. Chen learns when the rink will be available for workouts a few hours beforehand, and he communicates now and then with his coach, Rafael Arutunian, via video chat, but mostly only seeing him at competitions.

But none of these changes have put a kink in Chen's style. Even a two-week bout with the flu before this year's nationals couldn't slow him down. In the Saturday short program, all he did was break his own nationals record by landing two quads and notching 114.13 points.

That put him in the lead heading into Sunday, where he nailed four quad jumps in an incredible free-skate performance set to "Rocket Man" that brought the crowd to its feet. That routine earned him 216.04 points, for a total of 330.17, which beat his nearest competitor by more than 35 points.

His nearest competitor was Jason Brown, the 2015 national champion, whose artistry this year prevented an all Asian-American nationals sweep. Before Brown's



**SKATING STREAKS.** Alysa Liu performs during her senior women's free skate program at the U.S. Figure Skating Championships in Greensboro, N.C. Liu takes pressure and competition in stride, which was on display for all at this year's competition. (AP Photo/Lynn Hey)

And Liu's reason for breaking those records is both simple and incredibly confident. "I feel that when you have learnt triples, you want to move on learning quads," she said during a recent interview, as if it's so easy to move on from a difficult jump to a nearly impossible one.

Liu takes pressure and competition in stride, which was on display for all at this year's U.S. nationals. Bradie Tennell had taken the lead on Thursday with the highest score ever in the short program, while Liu came in second.

Then Liu fell in her last practice jump before Friday's final, a mistake that often shakes the confidence of other skaters. And just before Liu took the ice on Friday, Mariah Bell blew the crowd away with a career performance that featured seven triple jumps.

Immediately following Bell's routine, Liu skated onto the ice to warm up, weaving amid the stuffed animals thrown there by Bell's supporters. A lesser skater could have been rattled by either the fall or the pressure to follow such a great free skate, but Liu showed that she had ice in her veins that matched the surface under her skates.

Liu won the U.S. title by more than 10 points over Bell, not only nailing her triples but becoming the first U.S. woman to attempt a quad at nationals (she landed it well, but the judges determined she had under-rotated the jump). And for the second year in a row, Bell and Tennell had to help the diminutive Liu up to the top of the medal podium.

The 14-year-old Liu should soon grow tall enough to reach the top of the podium without assistance, and she should have many more trips there. For now, she is focused on the 2022 Beijing Olympics, since no U.S. woman has won an Olympic skating medal since 2006, when Sasha Cohen won silver.

Chen also has his eyes firmly fixed on Beijing. In 2018, he was just beginning his meteoric rise at the senior level, and he failed to reach expectations at the Olympics in PyeongChang.

Already known for his jumping ability, the then-18-year-old Chen failed to land a quad and fell during a triple in the short program. Even a free skate in which he landed six quads, setting a new record, wasn't enough to bring him into contention. Chen won bronze in the team event, but he will be looking for redemption in 2022, even as Liu looks to continue her own rise to the top of women's skating.

If their performances during the U.S. nationals are any guide, we can expect not only superb athleticism and record-setting jumps but also calm nerves and dramatic showdowns against the best talent in the world. Asian-American sports fans can hardly wait.

performance, Tomoki Hiwatashi sat in second place, and Vincent Zhou had the bronze medal sewn up. But Brown had an impressive performance of his own that bumped Hiwatashi into third and Zhou completely off the podium.

### Alysa Liu

On the women's side, young Alysa Liu has been building a legend of her own. At last year's nationals, she became the youngest U.S. champion ever at age 13, defeating skaters many years her senior and with far more seasoning. And Liu did it with bravery and confidence, becoming the first woman ever to land three triple axels in one competition.

But she didn't stop there. Later that year at the U.S. Grand Prix Finals, she became the first woman to land a quadruple lutz, and the first to land a quad and triple axel in the same competition. What's most impressive about the second achievement is that it cuts against the grain of women skaters, who can either land a quad or a triple axel. Only Liu can do both.

## Olympic rings arrive in host city on barge into Tokyo Bay

TOKYO (AP) — The Olympic rings have arrived in Tokyo.

They sailed into Tokyo Bay on a barge and will stay there until the Olympics open on July 24 and close on August 9.

The blue, black, red, yellow, and green rings will be replaced after that by the symbol for the Paralympics Games, which open on August 25.

The symbol for the Paralympics is called *agitos*, which resembles three brush strokes in red, blue, and green. The word in Latin means "I move."

The five Olympic rings are gigantic. They stand 15.3 meters high — about 50 feet tall — and are 32.6 meters from end to end — about 100 feet in length.

"We decided to install the Olympic rings at this time because we wanted to do it first thing in the Olympic year," said Kenichi Kimura, an Olympic official with the Tokyo Metropolitan Government.



**RINGS ARRIVE.** A barge carrying the Olympic rings floats in the water near the Rainbow Bridge in the Odaiba district of Tokyo. The blue, black, red, yellow, and green rings sailed into Tokyo Bay on a barge and will stay there until the Olympics open on July 24 and close on August 9. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)

The location of the rings in Tokyo Bay is Odaiba Marine Park, which is the venue for triathlon and distance

swimming. The venue is a made-for-television location, with a view across the water of the Tokyo skyline and the Tokyo's Rainbow Bridge.

Many of Tokyo's venues are located around the bay.

The rings were the center of attention when Tokyo noted its six-months-to-go milestone with a fireworks display.

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			7	3	2		8
1	2	4					
7							
2	7	3	8		6		
	6		4	1	3	7	
						9	
				4	8	5	
6		9	7	5			

Difficulty level: Hard

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**Instructions:** Fill in the grid so that the digits 1 through 9 appear one time each in every row, column, and 3x3 box.

Solution to last issue's puzzle

Puzzle #89327 (Medium)

All solutions available at <www.sudoku.com>.

6	1	8	5	9	2	3	4	7
3	4	2	7	8	1	5	6	9
9	5	7	6	3	4	8	1	2
2	9	1	4	5	3	7	8	6
4	3	5	8	7	6	9	2	1
8	7	6	1	2	9	4	5	3
1	6	3	9	4	8	2	7	5
7	2	4	3	1	5	6	9	8
5	8	9	2	6	7	1	3	4

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