US Speedskating Media Clips

10 Athletes To Know For The U.S. Olympic Team Trials For Short Track Speedskating

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Eight spots on the U.S. Olympic Team are on the line as the fastest in American short track speedskating gather in Kearns, Utah, this weekend for the U.S. Olympic Team Trials.

The U.S. has earned quota spots for five men and three women to represent Team USA in PyeongChang this February based on results from four world cup events earlier this year. Who exactly will occupy those spots on the Olympic starting line will be settled this weekend at the Utah Olympic Oval.

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Three American women will compete in the Olympic 1,500-meter, and two in each the 500 and 1,000. The men will be represented by three athletes in the 500 and 1,500, two in the 1,000 and a four-man team in the 5,000-meter relay, where the Americans set a new world record last month at a world cup in Shanghai.

Two finals are competed for each of the three distances this week, and athletes earn points based on their two placements in each distance. They are then selected to the team based on their points total per distance and, potentially, based on their overall classification as well (their total points earned across all three distances).

Finals in the 1,500-meter will be conducted on Friday, followed by the 500- and 1,000-meter on Saturday and Sunday, respectively. The entire event will be broadcast live on NBCOlympics.com and will appear on TV on NBC Sports Network from 8:30 to 10 p.m. ET Friday, and on NBC Saturday from 2:30 to 4:00 p.m., and Sunday from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

As the clock ticks down to the trials, here are 10 speedskating hopefuls to watch:

Maame Biney

Just 17 years old, Biney is already being heralded as the future of U.S. women’s short track. The Ghana native, who came to the U.S. at age 5, earned that mantle after taking bronze in the 500-meter at the 2017 junior world championships and finishing as the top qualifier to this year’s world cup squad ahead of a trio of Olympians. Biney began as a figure skater but switched to speedskating after being told she skated too quickly for the other discipline. Twelve years on, the fast pace of the sport remains appealing, especially in the 500-meter, Biney’s favorite event.

Keith Carroll Jr.

Carroll earned his first world cup win with the U.S. men’s 5,000-meter relay squad as they set a surprise world record at the Shanghai World Cup last month in China. It was a big moment for the 26-year-old, who represented the Team USA at five inline skating world championships but gave up the sport to chase his Olympic dream on ice. In his three world championships appearances, Carroll’s best results have come as a member of the 5,000-meter relay team, a trend he’d love to continue this winter in South Korea.
J.R. Celski

The only person in the 16-man field with Olympic experience, the 27-year-old Celski is a three-time Olympic medalist, having won a silver medal with the 5,000-meter relay team in Sochi in 2014, as well as bronze medals in the 5,000 relay and the 1,500 in Vancouver in 2010. Celski also has a handful of medals from world championships, including gold in the 5,000 relay from 2009 and silver in the 500-meter in 2014. More recently, he distinguished himself by anchoring the relay team during its world record run last month in China.

Lana Gehring

A member of the team that won a bronze medal in the 3,000-meter relay at the Vancouver Games in 2010, Gehring missed the 2014 Olympic team and then switched to long track speedskating. After two seasons on the 400-meter track, she returned to the short track world cup circuit this year. So far the five-time world championships medalist has enjoyed a strong second wind, setting personal bests in the 500 and 1,000 already this season.

Thomas Hong

Hong’s roots in the sport run deep — his mother went into labor with him while at a speedskating rink in Seoul — but it’s his own ambition that pushes him forward. The up-and-coming 20-year-old acknowledges that it would be “a huge honor” to return to the country of his birth to compete at the Olympic Winter Games as a member of Team USA, and stands in good stead of achieving that goal after helping the U.S. men set the world record in the 5,000-meter relay at the Shanghai World Cup. He followed up with a bronze medal in the 5,000 relay at the world cup in Seoul a week later, his last major competition before the Olympic trials. Hong competed at the inaugural Winter Youth Olympic Games in 2012.

Jessica Kooreman

Fourth in the 1,000-meter at the 2014 Sochi Games and sixth in the 1,500, Kooreman knows about the glory of making it to the Olympics as well as the frustration of finishing just off the podium. A skater almost from the time she could walk, she once dominated the world of inline skating, winning 16 world championships titles before switching to ice in her 20s. The veteran of the U.S. team at 34, she is still at the top of her game, evidenced by her personal best in the 500-meter this past August in Utah.

John-Henry Krueger

Like teammate Hong, Krueger also has a special connection to South Korea: the 22-year-old lived and trained in Seoul, where he raced for the Korean National Sport University. The Olympic Oval in Kearns has been good to him, too: It was there in 2014 that he won his first and second individual world cup title, a 500-meter gold in 2014. In addition to being part of the world record team in Shanghai, he set a new personal best in the 1,000 in China, bolstering his case for Olympic inclusion four years after a bout of swine flu forced him to withdraw from the 2014 Olympic trials.

Ryan Pivirotto

After a successful junior career, Pivirotto has been steadily making his mark on the national team. This year, he was named to the U.S. world cup team, joining the likes of Carroll, Celski, Hong and Krueger on the international circuit, and he set a personal best in the 1,500 at the Seoul World Cup.
Kearns will be the second Olympic trials for the Ann Arbor, Michigan, native, who also participated in 2014.

Katherine Reutter-Adamek

After winning an Olympic silver medal in the 1,000-meter and bronze medal in the 3,000-meter relay from the Vancouver Games, Reutter-Adamek became the first American woman since Bonnie Blair in 1986 to win a short track world title, which she did by winning the 1,500 in 2011. Spurred by injuries and a desire to spend more time with her family, she retired in 2013 but returned to the sport three years later with the intention of making a run for PyeongChang. So far, so good for the 29-year-old who trains in Kearns: She earned a spot on the U.S. world cup team last season and earlier this year, winning the qualifier in the 1,000.

April Shin

Shin competed at the 2016 Winter Youth Olympic Games in Lillehammer, Norway, skating in the mixed team relay. Nearly two years on, an older and more experienced Shin will take the ice at her first U.S. Olympic Team Trials. The petite 19-year-old, 13th overall at the 2016 junior world championships, has been praised for her intuitive feel for the ice. She’s especially comfortable in the 1,500-meter, her best distance.

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Luca Lim was just 10 years old when he found himself glued to the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, enraptured by the speed and grace of short-track speedskating. He had dabbled in hockey before, but glowing on his television were elite athletes whirling around the ice at up to 40 mph atop tiny blades of metal.

“It was extremely exciting,” he said.

Fortunately for Lim, he happened to live in the Washington area, a burgeoning hotbed for the sport, featuring active speedskating clubs, world-class coaching and more and more promising young Olympic hopefuls.

Lim, now 17, is one of the 32 short-track speedskaters competing at the U.S. Olympic trials, which begin Friday in Kearns, Utah. Of that group, eight are from the Washington area, having honed their skills at local clubs and eager to punch their tickets to the PyeongChang Olympics.

That group includes Laurel’s Thomas Hong, who was part of a relay team that broke a world record last month in Shanghai; Reston’s Maame Biney, a 17-year-old who took bronze at this year’s junior world championships; Fairfax’s Brandon Kim, 16, who won the U.S. men’s junior title last year and North Potomac’s Gabriella Hachem, 19, who won the ladies’ title.

This surge of talent from the Washington area is no accident. Nathaniel Mills, three-time Olympian and a founder of the DC-ICE urban speedskating program, explained that more than a decade ago, the local clubs bulked up their offerings and created a pipeline for Korean coaches.

“It’s been a nonstop parade of expertise and motivated individuals since then,” he said. “It’s been a bit of a revolving door, but the commonality has been this commitment to excellence.”

The area coaches now include Potomac Speedskating Club’s Simon Cho, a bronze medal winner at the 2010 Olympics, Dominion Speedskating’s Kim Yun-Mi, who won gold medals at the 1994 and 1998 Winter Games, and United Capital Blades’ Hyun Jung Lee, a former member of the Korean national team. And the end result has been a culture of both well-honed talent and heightened expectations. Athletes from the D.C. area take up the sport at a young age and aren’t content to skate a couple of laps on weekends or target regional competitions.

Lim was hooked right away, and within a couple weeks of setting foot on ice, he was skating six times a week. Eight years later, his whole life is built around the sport. Since January, he has been living and training in South Korea. He is a senior taking online courses through George Washington University Online High School, which allows him to spend eight hours a day training and tend to his classwork in evenings or between workouts.
To compete at a high level, many speedskaters make similar sacrifices. At 20, Hong is the youngest member of the U.S. men’s team that has been competing in World Cup events. He was born in South Korea, moved to the United States when he was 5 and gravitated toward the sport shortly thereafter.

“At the time, it was just another way to be a part of the community,” he said, “especially for a new family in the States.”

The sport is much more popular in South Korea. Hong visited family there most summers, spending as much time on the ice as possible and training year-round. He grew quickly in the sport and at 16 was the youngest competitor at the 2014 Olympic trials, where he finished 11th and missed out on the squad that went to the Sochi Games.

Hong completed his freshman year at the University of Maryland before putting college on hold and relocating to Salt Lake City to train full-time with U.S. Speedskating, his heart set on competing at the PyeongChang Games.

“Growing up in Howard County where education is a big focus for families and where it’s really hard to sacrifice education for the sake of sport, it didn’t always seem logical,” Hong said. “But at the same time, me and my family, we knew that I’d have to make a sacrifice to pursue this passion.”

A year later, he has a good chance of qualifying for the Olympics and representing the United States in the country of his birth. Of the 32 skaters, just eight will qualify for PyeongChang — five men and three women. Hong has been a part of the men’s 5,000-meter relay team that twice found the podium on the World Cup circuit this year: the first-place, world-record race in Shanghai, which marked the first U.S. win in the race since 2013, and then a bronze medal performance a week later in Seoul. Hong’s top individual race this year was a 10th-place finish in a 500-meter race, his favorite distance.

“I think it’s a test of true skill — a perfect balance of reckless speed while also maintaining control,” he said. “I’ve always gravitated toward sprinting. I think that’s just the way my body has been. As I’ve gotten older, I’ve learned to appreciate the finesse of it as well.”

Skaters such as Hong, Lim, Kim and Biney are young enough to be contenders for the 2022 Olympics as well. But they already represent a generation of skaters who have taken advantage of the resources that flocked to the region more than a decade ago and turned Washington into a breeding ground for short-track speedskating in the United States.

“The skaters have high expectations of themselves,” Mills said. “They push themselves in practice to an unbelievable extent. That’s kind of what it takes. Their goal isn’t to necessarily be the best in the area or even the U.S. Their goal is: How can I compete with the world’s best?”
Established names headline U.S. short-track Olympic Trials, but inexperienced youngsters must rise


J.R. Celski penned a tweet last spring that resonates more and more as the 2018 Olympic Games inch closer.

"Most people aim to do amazing things when everybody is watching," he wrote. "Make it a habit to do them when nobody is."

It has remained atop Celski’s Twitter profile over 18 months later, his “pinned tweet,” that he wants every one of his 27,000-plus followers to see when they pay a visit to one of his social media profiles. Celski, a three-time Olympic medalist in short-track speedskating, has made a habit of pressing on.

The years after a silver medal in the men’s relay at the Sochi Games haven’t been easy. The 27-year-old who burst onto the scene at the Vancouver Games in 2010 as a double medalist has been riddled with injury after injury. Surgery to correct a labrum injury in his hip, then a torn MCL injury that kept him off the ice for an extended period of time was followed by a pesky back injury.

Celski believes he’s finally back to himself.

“Definitely,” he said. “It’s been years, for sure.”

All eyes will be on Celski and the U.S. short-track team this weekend at the Utah Olympic Oval as the eight guaranteed spots on the line for the 2018 Games in PyeongChang, South Korea, will be assigned after trials commence Friday evening in Kearns.

“It’s natural to doubt yourself when you’re faced with those injuries, where physically you don’t know if you’re going to be able to come back from,” said Celski, who won a World Cup bronze earlier this year, his 25th World Cup medal of his career. “I definitely had a lot of fears and doubts, and it took a lot to mentally push through and tell myself that the goal is ahead still and I need to get there.”

He’s almost there.

Alongside Celski, skaters such as John-Henry Krueger, Thomas Hong and Keith Carroll Jr., are expected to contend for the men’s slots. Olympic veterans such as Jessica Kooreman, Katherine Reutter-Adamek and Lana Gehring headline the women’s side. But a 17-year-old up-and-comer is turning heads this year.

Maame Biney is one of many youngsters aiming to cement her first Olympics appearance this weekend. Biney, who was born in Ghana before moving to the U.S. at 5, eventually took up speedskating in Virginia. She slowly moved up the national ladder before relocating to Utah this summer. She won bronze at the 2017 short-track junior world championships earlier this year.

“Since I’ve been here,” she said, “I’ve woken up and I’m like, ‘Holy cow, I’m training with the people I have to skate with in order to be on the team, and they’re all so good.'”

Outside of the established names, it’s a relatively inexperienced group chasing their lifelong dreams this weekend. U.S. short-track coach Anthony Barthell understands that, too.
“To prepare them for this weekend, it’s a four-year ordeal,” he said. “Once I came in two years ago, the one thing I kept stressing to them was to take every competition like you’ve done it before. You’ve been there, done it, no matter what stage you’re on. I think that’s where they are right now.”

Celski, meanwhile, is one of the few vets who will make sure to calm nerves if necessary.

“There’s definitely a lot of anxiety from everybody,” he said. “It’s a big weekend, and everyone wants to do well, obviously. It could be the peak of some people’s careers to make this team.”
Born In South Korea, Short Tracker Thomas Hong Aims For Olympic Return

https://www.teamusa.org/News/2017/December/11/Born-In-South-Korea-Short-Tracker-Thomas-Hong-Aims-For-Olympic-Return

Legend has it that U.S. short track speedskater Thomas Hong was born in an ice rink.

Not quite.

Hong, who helped Team USA set a world record in the men’s 5,000-meter relay at a world cup event last month in Shanghai, was born in a South Korean hospital, but his mom’s water did break when she was at a speedskating rink in Seoul while watching his then-6-year-old sister Stephanie learn the sport.

The Hong family, originally from South Korea, moved to the Baltimore area when Thomas was 4, and a year later, he set blade to ice. The rest of the story continues to be written in success.

Now 20, Hong hopes to return to South Korea for his most important races ever: as a member of Team USA for the Olympic Winter Games PyeongChang 2018 in February.

“First and foremost, I think it would be a huge honor to represent the United States at the highest level of sport, the Olympic Games,” Hong said from South Korea while preparing for the final world cup of the season, where he helped the U.S. earn a bronze in the relay.

“The fact that these Games will be in South Korea, where I was born, it’s a whole extra thing to be proud of, to be in the country where I was born and have my family be able to watch me; not just my immediate family, but my extended family. It would be a huge honor.”

Hong grew up in Maryland with his sister, mom Hang Jung Hong and grandmother Okja Moon. His father, DooPyeo Hong, returned to South Korea for better employment opportunities while the rest of the family remained in the United States.

“We were fortunate enough to travel back and forth to Korea, so it wasn’t weird,” Thomas said.

Hong’s ties to his birth country have remained strong over the years. He returned to South Korea in the summers and trained there, as well as at home in Maryland with the Potomac Speedskating Club at the Wheaton Ice Arena.

During one of those summers he trained at the Goyang-si Rink, where he and U.S. his teammates showed up prior to the Seoul World Cup to share the sport with intellectually impaired South Koreans as part of the United States Olympic Committee’s “Thank You, PyeongChang,” goodwill campaign.

And last year, he took part in a world cup that served as a test event at the Gangneung Ice Arena, where the Olympic Winter Games will be staged.

“It was very thrilling,” Hong remembered. “Individually I did all right, but it was actually my first world cup medal with the men’s 5,000 relay. We got bronze, and it was a thrilling experience. The South Korean people knew it was the Olympic facility, and it was a great place to skate off the energy the crowd gave out.”

Hong drew attention as a short track speedskater almost from the get-go. He represented Team USA at the Winter Youth Olympic Games Innsbruck 2012, and one year later competed at the 2012-13 world junior championships.
“The Youth Olympic Games was my first international competition,” Hong said. “When we are at world cups, we are amongst the same people from our sport all the time, but at the Youth Olympic Games, there are so many athletes from different sports. It was really interesting to meet new people from different sports. Although we didn’t compete in the same discipline, we had a ton of mutual respect for each other.”

In 2014, he was the youngest competitor at the U.S. Olympic Team Trials, while in 2016-17 he won a silver medal in the 500-meter and a bronze medal in the 3,000-meter relay at the world junior championships, in addition to helping the senior men’s 5,000-meter relay to that world cup bronze medal at the Olympic test event. This season he has already helped set the relay world record in Shanghai, and then he wrapped up the world cup season with another 5K relay bronze medal in South Korea.

Hong is now on target for the 2018 U.S. Olympic Team Trials, which take place Dec. 15-17 at the Utah Olympic Oval in Kearns, Utah. The men’s 5,000-meter relay team has already qualified an Olympic spot. Should Hong skate on it in PyeongChang 2018, there will be plenty of eyes on him.

“My dad is there,” Hong said. “I have three sets of aunt and uncles there, and four cousins. A lot of my cousins were educated abroad, so I would see them every other year.”

He is hopeful for the chance to represent the country where he grew up, in the country where he was born, on the biggest athletic stage in the world.

And he’ll definitely be a crowd favorite.

Gary R. Blockus is a journalist from Allentown, Pennsylvania who has covered multiple Olympic Games. He is a freelance contributor to TeamUSA.org on behalf of Red Line Editorial, Inc.
Olympic star mentors students who wonder how he got up from ghastly crash


The face on the screen was familiar to the students from Concord’s Oak Grove Middle School. They had viewed the videos he had sent them earlier in the school year. They were familiar with his story — a dashing speed skater, so talented, so young. And then the horrible injury in which he crashed during a short-track race, his right skate slicing his left thigh to the bone.

The students filed into the school’s media room. This time, J.R. Celski, Olympic medalist, was interacting with them via video from Salt Lake City.

“I’m sitting in the speed skating oval. Want to see?” he asked, turning his laptop around and pointing the camera at the rink. “Pretty cool, right?” The students’ oohs and ahhs confirmed Celski’s presumption.

The video chat was courtesy of Classroom Champions, a nonprofit conceived in 2009 by Olympic gold medalist bobsledder Steve Mesler. Pairing Olympians and Paralympians with classrooms on a year-long mentorship program, Classroom Champions stresses goal-setting, education and perseverance.

Pretty cool, right? Take yourself back to those awkward middle school years. Would a video mentorship offered by Eric Heiden, or Matt Biondi, or Jonny Moseley, or Mary Lou Retton, or Katie Ledecky have been of interest to you?

In Celski, the Oak Grove students have been handed a gem, personable and relatable. They couldn’t wait to get to the questions.

A sampler:
Q: “Would you like to have a book about yourself?” A: “Yes I would, of course,” Celski said. “But I’m going to give it a little time. I’m only 27. I started speed skating when I was your guys’ age.”
Q: “What’s your favorite video game?” A: “It was Halo, but then as I got older my favorite was Call of Duty.”

He was asked whether he had any siblings; whether he would ever want to be a coach; whether speed skating was something he could retire from; whether racing was stressful; whether he missed home (Celski, born in Fort Ord, lives in Federal Way, Washington); whether he was concerned that someone would bomb the upcoming Olympics at South Korea.

Most of the serious questions were regarding Celski’s injury. It happened at the U.S. Olympic trials five months before the 2010 Winter Games. It took 60 stitches to close the wound.

“I had never experienced anything like it,” Celski said. “I had a moment on the ice when I thought I’d never get up.” He later told one of his doctors he was “glad it happened to me” because he learned about himself.

P.S.: He won five medals in the subsequent Olympics. The mentoring medalist.

“You realize that it’s not earning a medal that’s the cool part,” he told the students. “It’s the hours you put in, that are representative of all that goes into (winning).” And then, just that quickly, whimsy came calling.
“Have you ever seen a zamboni before?” Celski asked, whipping his laptop around to show the students two big, boxy machines that resurface the ice.

Even after Celski signed off, there seemed to be a buzz in the room.
“It’s kind of hard to explain,” said sixth-grader David Aria, 11, “but someone that you see from the Internet, you see them talking to you. It’s like, out of any other people, (he) chose us.”

“It felt nice talking to someone who has already accomplished things that are very important to a sport,” said Daniel Patarroyal, 11. “And the fact he had a very bad injury and was able to start like nothing happened is very inspiring.”

Teacher Lisa Brown was struck by the way Celski’s interaction with the students validated what they had talked about in class.

“We discussed in the classroom how people who are famous start out as common people just as we are,” she said. “That can be you also, one day, on the screen.”
The future looks bright for US Speedskating’s short track team, with individual performers, relay squads and up-and-comers all showing improved times and results during the 2016-17 season.

“We’re trying to rebuild,” said Guy Thibault, high performance director at US Speedskating. “This (pre-Olympic) season, we only had two athletes on the team that were in Sochi — the others were newcomers. Everyone is getting more and more experience, and you can never get enough experience in short track.”

Here are a few of the most encouraging events:

Celski Re-Emerges as the Top U.S. Performer
After two injury-plagued seasons, three-time Olympic medalist J.R. Celski (Federal Way, Wash.) showed significant signs of finding his best form, right on time for the PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games.

The 26-year-old skater, who recovered from a torn hip labrum during the 2014-15 season only to injure his right MCL (knee) in a crash at the national championships last year, claimed a bronze medal in the 1000m at the ISU World Cup in February in Dresden, Germany. It was his first individual World Cup medal in more than three years.

“It feels good to be back in the mix,” Celski said after the race. “Overall, I’m really happy with the way the day went. I remain confident that the work we are putting in as a team is pushing us in the right direction and that the results will continue to improve.”

Celski now holds 23 World Cup medals, with 15 coming in individual races.

Thibault counts an in-form Celski and John-Henry Krueger (Pittsburgh, Pa.) as the biggest U.S. threats for an individual short track medal in PyeongChang.

“I think we will get one or two medals, and I count (Celski), and possibly (Krueger), as absolutely capable,” Thibault said. “Those two guys could be on the Olympic podium. Short track is more unpredictable than long track, but I do expect one or two medals.”

No World Medal, but Improved Relay Times
For the third straight season, U.S. skaters fell short of bringing home a medal from the World Short Track Speed Skating Championships, which were held in March in Rotterdam, Netherlands. Still, Thibault was encouraged by some of the results, including Celski’s 13th-place finish in the men’s overall classification and Jessica Kooreman’s (Melvindale, Mich.) 16th-place finish in the women’s overall classification.

In addition, Celski - a member of the silver-medal winning U.S. men's relay at the Sochi Games - plus Krueger, Keith Carroll Jr. (Honey Brook, Pa.) and Thomas Hong (Laurel, Md.) placed seventh in the 5000m relay. Aaron Tran (Federal Way, Wash.) contributed in an earlier heat.

“I saw huge signs. We’ve worked a lot on speed,” Thibault said. “Our guys really pushed themselves and it was a huge progression. Is it strong enough? No, not yet, but it’s getting there.”
Meanwhile, the women’s 3000m relay team, with Kooreman, Katherine Reutter (Champaign, Ill.), Kristen Santos (Fairfield, Conn.) and Kimi Goetz (Flemington, N.J.), set a new U.S. standard at the World Cup in early November in Calgary, Alberta.

The Return of Reutter
Reutter, a two-time 2010 Olympic medalist and 2011 world champion, returned to competition this season after accumulated injuries caused her to retire in 2013 at age 24. She won the 1500m title at the U.S. Speedskating Short Track Championships in January and qualified for her first world championships since 2011, but a concussion forced her to withdraw.

“I made the Winter World Cup Team, earned a individual spot on World Championship Team, and qualified for the 2017-2018 U.S. National Short Track Team — I’m so grateful for 2nd chances!” Reutter posted on social media.

Krueger Finishes Strong in World Cup Standings
Krueger, the 22-year-old skater, who finished fourth overall in the 1500m World Cup standings, won the first individual U.S. World Cup medal in nearly two years when he claimed 1500m bronze in Salt Lake City, breaking the United States’ longest drought in the two-decade history of the World Cup. It was his fifth individual World Cup medal since the Sochi Games.

“Everyone has made big improvements from last year and have really raised the bar for difficulty in the races, but that’s what makes us stronger and helps us prepare,” Krueger said after the short track world cup qualifier. “The sport is constantly changing when it comes to power, strength and racing ability. I want to adapt real quick and then prepare for PyeongChang.”

Strong World Junior Results
The future looks bright, with Team USA claiming three medals at the World Junior Short Track Speed Skating Championships, held in late January in Innsbruck, Austria.

Maame Biney (Reston, Va.) won bronze in the women’s 500m, the first women’s world junior medal since 1996. Hong took silver in the men’s 500m, the first men’s individual medal since Krueger’s in 2012. Finally, the men’s 3000m relay team took bronze, the first relay medal since 2012.

“(Biney) is our first women’s world junior medallist in a while,” Thibault said. “She’s still in high school; people need to watch for her. And (Hong) surpassed a junior world record. Next year, they will be older and more mature, and I expect a lot from them, and a few other juniors. . . They’re not in the medal conversation for (PyeongChang), but they could be for Beijing in 2022.”

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Emerging U.S. Speedskating Talent John-Henry Krueger Charting His Own Path


Kearns • John-Henry Krueger crossed the finish line victorious, both fists flung into the air, upon winning the sixth — and last — men’s 1,500-meter World Cup qualifying race in six hours. The 22-year-old who grew up outside Pittsburgh, Pa., is considered one of America’s top short-track speedskaters, so winning a 1,500-meter event in a weekend packed with U.S. World Cup team qualifiers isn’t much of a stunner.

What’s fascinating, however, is the path Krueger is on.
It’s ever-winding, still-circling the globe.

The talented skater once called the Utah Olympic Oval in Kearns his home track, and technically, it still is. But Krueger has charted his own course toward perhaps more podiums, more World Cup medals, and perhaps an inaugural Olympic appearance at the upcoming Pyeongchang Games in South Korea in February.

“Moving around is just part of a normal day for me,” he said. Two years ago, Krueger left training on a full-time basis in the Salt Lake City suburb, home to U.S. Speedskating, to train in Seoul, South Korea. Already on an upward trajectory in the sport, Krueger sought out something different, more unique with the move. He found it, but once again, recently felt the need to seek guidance elsewhere.

Instead of the bustling bright lights and vibrant culture of one of Asia’s largest cities, Krueger is now in what he describes as “cow country” in the Dutch town of Heerenveen, a noted hotbed for long-track speedskating. Less than a year out from what could be his Olympic debut, Krueger took a risk and packed his bags.

It was, he said, “the last thing I wanted to do.” In a conversation with his mom, he told her he’d rather try something new and fail miserably as opposed to staying where he was, and well, ending up at the same result. Leaving Seoul wasn’t easy, Krueger said. But what the young American skater yearned for was more individuality and freedom in training.

With how popular short-track skating is in Korea, there simply wasn’t enough time for needed 1-on-1 time with coaches.

“What tends to happen is they give you a little bit of a cookie-cutter style type of training,” explained the 15-time World Cup medalist, “which isn’t terrible, but when you’re a skater at my level, you need a little bit more individuality.”

So one day earlier this year, Krueger got to talking with Kip Carpenter, now an assistant coach and blade technician with the Dutch short-track team. Carpenter was a one-time U.S. standout in both long- and short-track skating. He won a bronze medal in the 2002 Olympics in Salt Lake City. Carpenter spoke to Dutch coach Jeroen Otter about Krueger’s situation.

No matter the national team, Krueger said Otter wants to piece together the best training team possible to help Dutch skaters. So he waved goodbye to Seoul and relocated 80 miles north of Amsterdam. When the U.S. national team hosts events, Krueger’s decision to live and train abroad puts more of a physical burden on him than when he is operating out of the Salt Lake Valley.
“I spend more time on an airplane than I do at home,” he said.

To read the entire article from the Salt Lake Tribune, click here.
Maame Biney Looking Like The Future Of US Speedskating


KEARNS, Utah (AP) Maame Biney seems like the typical teenager. She giggles with her friends, is making her way through the Harry Potter movies and wants to go to homecoming. But that’s where typical ends for the 17-year-old speedskating phenom.

Biney is on a path to be the next great U.S. short track speedskater with the Olympics six months away. The Junior World Championship bronze medalist was the America’s Cup winner at the U.S. Speedskating Short Track World Cup Qualifier this weekend against Olympians and skaters 10-plus years her senior. She won three of six finals over the three days.

Biney is intimidated, sure, but that hasn’t stopped her from chasing her dreams – literally.

"Before I came here in the month of June, I had a week worth of dreams about going to the Olympics," Biney said. "I woke up and was like, `(Gasp), oh no, I’m not there!’

"But I’m so excited to go if I make it. And I really want to make it. … (It would be) mind-blowing."

The journey to this point has been a bit random. Biney moved to the United States from Ghana to be with her father at 5 years old. She was supposed to be coming for a short visit and cried her eyes out when she first arrived. Her father, Kweku, had to pull the car over three times after picking Maame up from the airport to settle her down. She wanted to go home. But a trip to the mall and J.C. Penney started to change her mind and soon afterward Maame was repeatedly asking to stay.

Kweku was living in Rockville, Maryland, and found a school and day care and their new life began. One day they were driving down the street in Reston, Virginia, and Kweku looked over and saw a sign that read "Learn To Skate This Fall." He asked Maame if she was interested and that’s how it all started.

Ice skating isn’t exactly a popular endeavor in Ghana, so she didn’t know anything about the sport. She’d never seen a rink, but Kweku signed her up anyway.

"We weren’t looking for anything, we were just driving around," Kweku said. "She didn’t even know what skating was. She didn’t even know what that word was and I explained it to her."

"Only thing cold in Ghana is cold beer."

Maame ended up being a natural, and it didn’t take long before the coach suggested speedskating.

Twelve years later, Maame has moved to Salt Lake City to train in hopes of making the Olympic team, which begins short-track trials on Dec. 15. Kweku suggested taking the year off from high school, but she didn’t want to fall behind. Maame wanted to graduate with her friends, so the school arranged for her to take online classes to stay on track while she trains.

Those types of decisions are the hardest part for Maame, who misses out on many of the normal teenage trappings.

"I feel like that’s the worst part of skating 24/7, not being able to go to homecoming the last three years and not able to hang out with my friends whenever they want to do something," Maame said.
through another bout of laugher. "It's like, `Oh no, I can't, I have practice.' I like it, because I also have friends here. So it's kind of like a win-win kind of situation, in a way.

"Not having a very good social life, I guess. I'm surrounded by speedskaters all the time and I'm not saying anything bad about them or anything, but we're not the most mature people in the world. We are not. Even though I'm 17, I feel like I'm a 12-year-old. I am not ready to be 18 in four months."

To read the full article, click here.
LITTLE ROCK, Ark.- The distance between South Korea and the west coast of the United States is about six thousand miles. That means when us athletes travel to Pyeong Chang for the Winter Olympics. They'll be traveling very far from their friends and families.

Thomas Hong is a speed skater, a young one, as he just turned 20 in July.

"For me being young, not everyone knows exactly my capabilities and stuff like that. So there's definitely some underestimating there, I can sneak up on people," Hong said.

He almost did that a few years ago. Hong was the youngest competitor at the 2014 Olympic trials as he was just 17. He would go on to finish 11th overall.

Since then, he's won silver at the world junior championships. Hong is also a six-time national champion in his age group.

"Everyone's doing the same thing. What can you do to be better than your competitors? Learning who you are in the sport."

It's been an ongoing lesson since he was five years old, the age that Hong began skating. His family had just moved to the US from South Korea.

"And for some reason we knew somebody in the area and they happened to be doing short track speed skating. and it was just another way for us to get to know the community."

That was in Maryland. Hong has since moved to Utah to train full time. Now thinking full time about South Korea in February as his dad still lives there.

"Just having familiar eyes watching me. I think that'll definitely give me an extra spark."

Before going to South Korea, Hong first has to qualify for Team USA. The Olympic Trials for short track speed skating are in mid-December in Salt Lake City.
**Who is Jessica Kooreman?**

http://wavy.com/2017/10/03/who-is-jessica-kooreman/

Jessica Kooreman, who competed at the 2014 Sochi Olympics under her maiden name, Smith, dominated the world of inline skating before switching to short track in her early 20’s. Now 33 years old and a two-time world championship medalist, Kooreman will likely be the veteran member of a young team of the U.S. women’s short track squad competing in PyeongChang.

Speed skating beginnings

Kooreman started skating early thanks to her parents.

“My father Rick grew up racing on roller skates and enjoyed the sport,” Kooreman said. “My mom also skated in her early teens. She wishes she had started earlier, and so by the age of one she put me on skates and I haven’t looked back since.”

By two years old, Kooreman was already competing in roller skating races under her father’s coaching. Her mother encouraged her to pursue other activities, so Kooreman also participated in ballet classes, modeling and children’s beauty pageants. But after a few years, Kooreman’s mother told the six-year-old that she had to make a choice.

“I started getting floor burns on my knees,” Kooreman said. “And my mom was like, ‘You need to keep wearing your knee pads,’ and I was not wanting to wear knee pads. And she’s like, ‘Well, it’s knee pads or modeling. You have to choose.’ And I’m like, ‘I’m not wearing knee pads, so I guess I’m done modeling.’”

Kooreman earned sixteen inline skating world titles, and hoped that if she waited long enough the sport would be added to the Olympic program. But by 24 years old, she realized that switching sports might be her only path to the Olympics.

She tried long track skating first, but decided short track speed skating was more her style because she disliked long track skating’s time trials. She switched full-time from inline to ice skating in 2008, made her first national team in 2009 and was chosen as an alternate for the U.S. Olympic short track team at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Games.

“Getting to the point of making this transition and realizing that I’m starting completely over at 24 years old… you know, that’s even harder to give everything up and to say, you know what, I’m gonna have to re-climb this ladder, and I’m older now, and is that possible?”

*Jessica Kooreman on switching from inline to speed skating*

Breakout moment

After getting a late start in the sport of short track, Kooreman didn't make her first world championships podium until she was 28 years old. She helped the U.S. women win a silver medal in the 3000m relay at the 2012 World Short Track Speed Skating Championships.

Olympic experience

Two years later, Kooreman proved she was the U.S.’ top female short track skater when she won all three individual events at the 2014 U.S. Olympic Trials.
At the Sochi Winter Olympics, her best finish was fourth in the 1000m.

“Being fourth at the Olympics is interesting,” she said. “You know, it’s kinda sweet. I joke about it because on one hand, I’m very proud to be fourth at the Olympics. That’s something that I take to heart… And I have no regrets with how I raced. But then on the other hand, I joke about how I got copper, and they don’t give a medal for copper. Nobody gets a medal for fourth, and everyone remembers one through three. So it’s definitely something that’s motivated me to keep going, mainly because I felt like I accomplished fourth at the Olympics after not really being on short track as long as a lot of the others have.”

Major competitions
Kooreman won her second world championship medal a few months after the Sochi Games when she finished second in the 3000m (a distance which is raced at the Olympics) at the 2014 World Championships. She also competed at the 2015, 2016 and 2017 Worlds, but didn’t pick up any additional medals.

Signature
Kooreman can often be distinguished from the short track pack by her helmet, which features the head of a bald eagle over an American flag background.

Top quotes
“I actually tried long track [speed skating] for a little bit to give that a chance, and I just did not have fun doing it. I don’t like time trialing, and in my sport of short track, we compete, we race, we’re jostling for position. And I just enjoy being out there and competing against people and having the best strategy, and seeing how it might not be the fastest, but the smartest that wins. Or it might be the fastest that wins that day. You just never know.” —Jessica Kooreman

Off the ice
Kooreman has been married to Mike Kooreman, a retired short track skater, since 2015. They met at a World Cup competition in Russia, and had their first date in Germany on Valentine’s Day. Mike currently works as the program manager for the U.S. long track speed skating team, and will be their team leader at the 2018 PyeongChang Olympics.

The Kooremans live in Salt Lake City, Utah with their Jack Russell terrier, Hurley Bean, and their roommate, Olympic speed skater Brittany Bowe. Kooreman and Bowe were roommates before Kooreman and Mike married, and say that their house is like “Three’s Company.”

Kooreman found time amidst her training to earn her real estate license in Utah. “I use my occupation to fund my athletic career and will continue with it after I have retired from speed skating,” she said. “Having a balanced work and athletic career is almost impossible at times due to the training that is required in my sport. We spend 6-8 hours per day training, which leaves very little time for my occupation. I have to push myself in my work with the same enthusiasm and drive that I put towards speed skating. It takes a lot of self-discipline to manage both.”

Social media
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/JessicaSmithUSA/
Twitter: https://twitter.com/thejessicasmith
Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/thejessicakooreman/
Q&A with John-Henry Krueger

http://wwlp.com/2017/10/06/qa-with-john-henry-krueger/

What’s your family like?

My father, Bryan, is a corporate accountant. My mother, Heidi, is a competitive figure skating coach. My older brother Cole is a short track speed skater, representing Hungary.

In your hometown, what are your favorite spots to relax, eat out, etc.?

When I go home I go to my dad’s boss’s farm for target practice. I enjoy going to the Pittsburgh Paints Arena to watch the Pittsburgh Penguins. The strip district near downtown Pittsburgh is a street comprised of local food shops and cultural artisans. I also enjoy visiting the historic amusement park, Kennywood. I also like to take my dogs to Mingo Park (a large local county park). While there are many great restaurants in Pittsburgh I prefer my mom’s home cooking.

What time do you wake up? How much, and when, do you sleep each day during training?

6:00 a.m. I usually take naps after an early morning training session. I try to get at least 7-8 hour of sleep each night.

How much time do you spend training each day?

Every week is different depending on the training cycle, but a normal day can consist of 6-8 hours of training.

What’s your typical training day/schedule?

On a normal day I will wake up at 5:30 a.m. and get to the ice rink to start my off ice warm up at 6 a.m. The warm up consists of jogging, dynamic stretches, and light skating drill exercises to prepare for ice training. After warmup, I will go on the ice for two hours of training. After ice training the team will have off ice training that is commonly called dryland. This training can consist of weights, running, power jumps, and skating movements. After training I will go home to rest and eat. The second training session usually starts later in the day. In the afternoon we will start dryland training first at 4 p.m. and that can last one to two hours. Then we will get back on the ice to skate for another two hours.

How do you work to achieve your daily goals?

A daily goal for me is usually a technical issue in my skating technique or balance on the ice. I only focus on that one problem or goal at a time. I try not to think about tomorrow’s problems or challenges. I try to work one day at a time.

What is your favorite workout or fitness trend?

I really like weight training. I only do it 2-3 times a week. While it remains very challenging for me it gives me a break from the off ice dryland training I do so much of.

What’s the most grueling work out you’ve ever done?

The hardest training I remember in my career was Sand Camp in Eerie, Pennsylvania. It was only off ice training. There were two dryland sessions each day, but each session lasted 4-6 hours. Lots of running and skating drills. The camps lasted about 5 days.
What would people be surprised to learn about training for the Olympics?

How much hard work and time is required to perform at the World Cup/Olympic level. Short track speed skating can look easy, but that's only because athletes train many hours a day to make it look smooth and relaxed. I imagine that is how all the other sports work too. The best make it look easy.

Is there anything you do for training that’s out of the ordinary or experimental?

I don’t think so. While I am open to new training ideas and philosophies I feel very stable and set in my training philosophy. I’ve been training for a long time so I’ve been able to hone in on what training works for me and what doesn’t.

Have you ever been seriously injured?

I have been very fortunate not to have any serious injuries in my skating career. I try to take care of myself every day to hopefully avoid this.

What does a typical day of eating look like during training?

During the training season I won’t follow any special diet or nutrition plan. I try to get a healthy moderate mix of all the food groups. I don’t see food as a plan. Food is an enjoyable part of life for me. I don’t eat too much during training. The only regimen I will follow is to get some source of protein in me after a workout and to stay hydrated.

Since I wake up early and I don’t have time to prepare a full breakfast will just have a granola bar or protein shake in the morning, I try to keep it simple.

During lunch I can have a pretty broad menu to work with. I will make something as simple a chicken salad or something more complex like a fish curry. It all depends on the day and what I feel like eating.

Since training finishes late it is very common for the team to eat out together for dinner. There are so many different Korean foods to choose from. It’s different every night.

What’s your go-to snack?

Kimbap. It is very common Korean snack food. It is seaweed wrapped rice roll with meats and vegetables. The meats can vary from beef to tuna.

If you are to indulge, what’s your go-to meal?

Normally, when I have a cheat meal it will be a Korean BBQ meal. It comes with lots of side dishes. My favorite snack would be sour gummy candy. I try to limit myself.

What is your earliest memory of doing or seeing skating?

Earliest memory of my sport was training at a local ice rink near my house when I was very young. My passion evolved the longer I stayed in the sport. I liked racing and I was very competitive naturally.

What’s your earliest or favorite memory of watching the Olympics?

Watching the 2006 Torino Winter Games. It is a huge personal goal of mine to not only compete in but to medal in the Olympic Games.
Was there a specific “breakthrough” moment/competition when you finally realized you could compete in your sport at a high enough level to reach the Olympics?

I don’t think there was a single defining moment. It all accumulated after many successful races.

What’s something cool, weird intense about your sport that people don’t normally see? What’s the hardest part of your sport?

The way we lean on our very thin skating blades to turn in the corners is very intense. We very often pull close to 2gs in the corners. The sport is growing and many countries are competitive now. Racing strategy is very important now.

Are there any misconceptions about your sport that you would like to clear up?

Many people believe short track looks easy. The only time people watch short track in America is during the Olympics. They are only watching the best of the best who make it look effortless. It can take over a decade of training to skate at this level.

Who is your coach? How long have you been working together and what’s your relationship like?

Over the course of my career I have been fortunate to work with many coaches. The relationship with one’s coach is critical to a successful athlete. This coming season I will be working with Coach Nam Kyu Zo.

Who do you socialize with most within your sport or any sport?
I mainly socialize with my training team in Korea and my teammates in America.

Have you ever worked with a sports psychologist? If so, how did it help you?

Yes, but very a very long time ago. She had a very positive influence on how to prepare mentally for races.

What’s the best piece of advice you’ve ever received?

In terms of my sport, the best advice I received was to experiment with everything. Technique, equipment, training philosophies. There is a short window of opportunity in the sport to be successful. Try to find everything that helps you grow in the sport personally.

What’s a big obstacle that you’ve overcome in your life?

Because of my skating career I had to become very independent at a very young age. However in the long run I see it as advantage and had a positive impact on the person I am today.

What is your biggest fear when competing?

I don’t really have a fear of anything, but I do hate to lose in a race.

What athlete in any sport has been your greatest source of inspiration?

Usain Bolt has been a favorite of mine over the years. I admire his relaxed, nonchalant, yet confident demeanor.

What advice would you give to a young child just starting out in short track?
To start off learning the basic techniques and to be patient with learning them. All skaters at the Olympic level start the season with the basics. You can never be too good for them.

What are your favorite sports teams?

Being from Pittsburgh it is almost mandatory to be a Pittsburgh Steelers fan. I also enjoy watching the Pittsburgh Penguins when I'm back in town.

Which Summer Olympic sport would you like to try?

I think I would enjoy some of the track and field events like the long jump and the 100 meter dash.

What are your pre-competition rituals?

I don’t have many. I just try to take care of my body every day the same way I would before a competition. So nothing really changes.

What languages do you speak?

I speak English and am very very very slowly learning Korean.

What charities do you support? How did you become involved?

Ballou Skies. My brother and I first learned of Ballou Skies through our attorney and agent Brian Koeberle. A business associate of his began this charity for his son who afflicted with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. My brother and I participate in their local fundraising events whenever we can. This charity has significantly impacted the treatment of this disease.

If you were not an athlete, what would you be doing?

I would probably be pursuing my goal of becoming an international English teacher.

When you have time off, what would constitute a perfect day for you?

Sleeping in late and going into downtown Seoul to meet with friends.

How do you unwind after a competition?

I tend to stay indoors for a day or two to catch up on sleep. Short track races tend to be very stressful and last all day.

Do you have any fears?

I am deathly afraid of heights.

Do you like to travel? What has been the most special place you have traveled to and why?

Traveling is a huge passion of mine. Traveling to China has been very eye opening and influential. Experiencing different cultures and lifestyles broadens one’s horizons and perspectives.

What’s something quirky about yourself that people would be amused to learn?

I feel really grossed out by touching dirty dishes in the sink.

What are some of your hobbies?
Listening to music is a huge part of who I am helps me cope with all the different situations I face in life. Music is something I love to share with others but there are also times I prefer to listen alone.

Do you have any celebrity crushes?

Kim Sarang. She is a very famous Korean actress in South Korea.

What are some of your favorite movies?

Inglorious Bastards, John Wick, and Life is Beautiful

What are your favorite TV shows?

Rick and Morty, Star Trek: The Next Generation, One Piece

Are you a fan of K-Pop music?

Yes, there are many Korean artists I like such as ZICO, ZionT, Big Bang, Dynamic Duo, Crush, and Primary, to name just a few.

What are your personal care indulgences? What are your top five beauty/grooming products?

Since moving to Korea I have adopted some of the cultural lifestyle routines regarding skincare. I have been taking care of my skin a lot more since my move to Korea.

Outside of training for your sport, what physical routine makes you feel your best?

I love deep tissue massages and going to saunas for recovery.

What are five must-have items you always keep in your gym bag?

Shaker Bottle, Protein bars, rubber exercise bands, foam roller, and tennis ball for hip foam rolling.

Do you like kimchi or any other Korean foods?

Yes, kimchi is a very common food in my diet. I enjoy almost all Korean food.

Have you ever done karaoke? What’s your go-to karaoke song?

No, I do not enjoy karaoke. Unfortunately for me, it remains a very popular and common activity in Korea.

What will success look like for you in PyeongChang? What are your goals?

To win an Olympic medal would be considered a success to me.
Q&A with Katherine Reutter-Adamek


Katherine Reutter-Adamek (who previously competed under just her maiden name, Reutter) won two medals at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics.

How influential were your parents in your athletic career and in what ways?

Extremely. Without their support I wouldn't have been in the 2010 Olympics or trying for 2018.

In your hometown, what are your favorite spots to relax, eat out, etc.?

Milwaukee-
1.) Bradford Beach
2.) Evo Ping Pong Bar
3.) Brewers game
4.) Summerfest
5.) Lopez Bakery

What time do you wake up?
6 a.m.

How much time do you spend training each day?
7 hours.

What's your typical training day/schedule?
6:45-7:45am warm up; 8-10 skate; 10-10:45 cool down; 1:30pm warm up; 2-4 dryland, lifting, and/or cardio; 4-4:30 cool down

How do you work to achieve your daily goals?

Make a goal for each training session. If I'm feeling frustrated, I ask myself why I'm doing something and then if I know, I can work toward the goal. If I don't know, I can try something different.

What is your favorite workout or fitness trend?

Yoga

What's the most grueling work out you've ever done?

Climbing Grouse Mountain in Vancouver twice.

What would people be surprised to learn about training for the Olympics?

How much other people are involved; I have a team of people who are the reason I'm able to physically and mentally handle the rigor of training and competing.

Is there anything you do for training that's out of the ordinary or experimental?

Almost everything! I have a different view on technique and training, I'm the only World Team athlete to train in Milwaukee, I use power lifting technique in the weight room, and rely heavily on an unusual activation routine to keep my hips in alignment and my body warmed up every day.
Have you ever been seriously injured?


What does a typical day of eating look like during training?

Currently I'm on a Whole 30 diet. It started as a way to reduce inflammation when recovering from my concussion, but now it's a way of life. I haven't tried it during training yet.

If you are to indulge, what's your go-to meal, snack or dessert?

What is your earliest memory of doing or seeing skating?
I remember my first speed skating practice at 5. The coaches all said I skated like a figure skater. I wanted to prove them wrong and show them I could skate like a speedskater.

What's your earliest or favorite memory of watching the Olympics?
My Dad used to play video recordings we had of the 92 and 94 Olympics when I was home sick from school. I remember watching Dan Jansen, Bonnie Blair, Kathy Turner, and Amy Peterson all win their medals.

Was there a specific “breakthrough” moment/competition when you finally realized you could compete in your sport at a high enough level to reach the Olympics?
University Games in 2007. It gave me the confidence boost I needed to make my first world championship team.

What's something cool, weird intense about your sport that people don't normally see? What's the hardest part of your sport?
The off-ice training. We have to train skating position all the time which is really hard on your body. Turning off your brain is the hardest part for me.

Are there any misconceptions about your sport that you would like to clear up?
It's all based on luck. Great skaters make their own luck and don't blame others when things don't go their way.

Who is your coach? How long have you been working together and what’s your relationship like?
Hong Yang Wang. He was my replacement when I stepped down from my head coaching job. He's been great! He always knows the right thing to say and I absolutely love working with him.

Who do you socialize with most within your sport or any sport?
I spend most of my time with my lifelong friends and family.

Have you ever worked with a sports psychologist? If so, how did it help you?
Yes, working with sports psychologists has been a critical part of training. Recently, I've been using a sports psych app called Vision Pursue that has literally changed my life inside and out of sport. What’s the best piece of advice you’ve ever received?

There's a difference between leading and pulling. Leading is easy... it's staying in control of the race and letting other move when they want to move. Pulling is hard. It will make you tired and you when the other skaters want to go you won't be able to stop them.

Life is the same. Controlling the controllable is relatively easy. Forcing things to be a certain way is hard and doesn't lead to outcome you want every time anyway.

What's a big obstacle that you've overcome in your life?

Anxiety and fear of failure. I wouldn't say I've overcome it, but I'm aware of it to the point where it doesn't overcome me.

What is your biggest fear when competing?

Losing and not being good enough.

Have you become close friends with any competitors from other countries? What about any from South Korea?

Elise Christie and Suzanne Schulting are two girls I really like and have a lot of respect for. There are two South Korean skaters from when I raced previously who I also like and have a lot of respect for: Lee Eun-Byul and Cho Ha-Ri. I loved racing both of them. They were true competitors who were always good sportsmen as well.

What was the best part of living in the Athletes' Village during the Games?

The after party!

Who was the most influential in helping you achieve your dreams? My grandma Fern. People say I'm a lot like her and I know it's her optimism and energy that shines through me that allows me accomplish my goals.

Did anyone ever tell you that you wouldn't be able to succeed in your sport? How were you able to overcome that?

Yes, I used it as motivation to prove them wrong.

How and where do you train over the summer?

In Milwaukee doing skating, running, jumping, biking, weight lifting, and skating specific work.

If you have already won an Olympic medal, where do you keep it?

I keep them in a drawer in a hallway table. I don't showcase it, but have it readily available to share if anyone wants to see it.

What is your favorite perk of being an elite Olympic athlete?
Working with chiropractors and athletic trainers all the time. I love learning about the body and how to keep mine in top condition.

Did you attend college? What was your degree and graduation year?

I graduated from DeVry University in December 2016 with a Bachelor's in Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

What's your favorite animal? Have you ever seen it in person?

Panda! Only in a zoo.

If you were not an athlete, what would you be doing?

I'd like to be a personal trainer and private chef in addition to teaching power skating to hockey players.

When you have time off, what would constitute a perfect day for you?

Going to the beach and reading.

How do you unwind after a competition?

Close my eyes and listen to music.

Do you have any fears?

Failure.

Do you like to travel? What has been the most special place you have traveled to and why?

I like adventure. I don't have to travel far to feel like I'm doing something exciting and new. My favorite place so far has been Colorado. My family and I vacationed all over the state and many of my favorite family memories are from that trip.

What's something quirky about yourself that people would be amused to learn?

I have Dad humor... You have to get to know me before you understand my jokes.

What's your personal motto?

"If you can't be a highway, just be a trail. If you can't be a sun, be a star. For it isn't by size that you win or fail. Be the best of whatever you are." -- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr

What are some of your hobbies?

Yoga, cooking, spending time with friends/family. I usually yoga by myself because I love the way it makes my mind and body feel. I like to cook with my fiancé. I travel to see my friends and family whenever I can.

What is your music of choice while training?

EDM or Pop. I really like Justin Bieber, The Chainsmokers, and Odesza.
Do you have any celebrity crushes?

Ryan Gosling.

Do you have an Olympic crush?

Evan Lysacek.

What are your favorite movies?

Pirates of the Caribbean, The Devil Wears Prada, Cool Runnings

What are your favorite TV shows?

Game of Thrones, Homeland, Vice

What are your personal care indulgences?

I love getting my nails done! I wish I could afford to dye my hair!

Outside of training for your sport, what physical routine makes you feel your best?

Meditating and going for walks outside.

What are five must-have items you always keep in your gym bag?

Heart rate monitor, cash, snack, migraine medicine, caffeinated gel or blocks

Have you been to South Korea before? What are you most looking forward to about the Games being hosted in South Korea? Anything you want to see or do?

Several times. I'm looking forward to competing in front of a huge crowd again. Short track is popular in every Olympics, but especially in South Korea!

Do you like kimchi or any other Korean foods?

Bibimbop. I like all Asian food, but don't love spicy food so I have to be careful in Korea.

Have you ever done karaoke? What's your go-to karaoke song?

No, but it's on my bucket list!

What will success look like for you in PyeongChang? What are your goals?

To learn how to be more positive and grateful. I judge myself so hard and have such a high expectation of success. In my comeback I'm hoping to change that about myself so that I can love life, people, and experiences without judgment or harsh expectations. Life can be more fun than that :)

Will you head home for the holidays prior to the Games? What do you most look forward to? If not, where will you celebrate and with whom?

I have no idea... It's my fiancé's family year for Christmas so we will likely go to Park City with my parents to celebrate with everybody.
During the holidays, do you have a special meal or food that you're always in charge of preparing?

Monkey bread! My grandma made it every Christmas and my mom and I have carried on her tradition. We made it last year with Hershey's kisses mixed in the dough. It's a keeper!!!

What's on your Christmas or holiday list this year?

I love gifts that I wouldn't normally get myself like nice jewelry or something that would make life around the house easier. Miles or gift cards to travel are always great too. Even if I don't have a trip coming up it helps me be able to spend more time with friends and family.
What's your family like?

My father is from St. Paul, Minnesota and my mother is from Seattle, Washington. They met in high school in Federal Way, WA when they were 17 years old after both families relocated to that area. My father attended West Point and joined the Army as an officer. They married after my father finished university. They then traveled around a bunch while he was in the Army, along the way having three sons all born in three different parts of the country/world. My brother Chris works at Nordstrom at their flagship store and sells suits for a living. He owns over 40 suits. He is married to Megan and they have a son named Ethan who turns 1 in April of 2017. My brother David is an officer in the Army and has been serving since 2007. He has been on 3 tours to the Middle East. He is married to Brit and they have a daughter named Quinn. She turns 2 this May.

Are you a first-generation American and where does your family come from?

My mother is first generation as her family moved here from the Philippines. My father's family has roots in Poland and Ireland.

How influential were your parents in your athletic career and in what ways?

My parents have had the biggest influence on my skating career. From getting me involved in the sport at 4 years old, taking me around the country to compete at regional and national levels, and finding me the right situations and coaches to help me along the way. I had a dream of competing in the Olympics and my parents never held me back from that. I wanted to move to Southern California in order to get the right training when I was 14. They sent me there along with my brother Chris. Everything they did was in order to provide and set me up for success in the sport and in life. I owe everything to my parents for keeping my dream alive and continuing to support me to this day.

Are you from a military family?

My father was a Major in the Army and my brother is currently a captain in the Army. The military has had a huge impact on my family. My parents moved around to several places in their lifetimes because of it. My father was stationed in Kansas when they had Chris, Germany when they had David, and California when they had me. When I was born, it was at the tail end of my Dad's career in the Army, so I didn't get to experience moving around a ton.

What are 5 must-do locations in your hometown?

My favorite spot to eat in Federal Way is Ichi Teriyaki. I go every time I make it back home. I spent a lot of time up the road in Seattle growing up and my favorite spots there are Fremont/Ballard, Alki and Capitol Hill. Paseo, Japonessa, Shiro's, and Ba Bar are my favorite restaurants.

How much time do you spend training each day?

6 - 8 hours a day is typical during our most intense periods. 6 is the average.

What's your typical training day/schedule?

I wake up at 6:45, eat breakfast, drive to the rink around 7:15 and arrive at 7:40. I spend 20 minutes with my athletic trainer to make sure my body is aligned properly and work on any problem areas.
from previous training sessions. I then warm up for an hour starting at 8. Then I get on the ice at 9 and train until around 11. After ice, we have a dryland (skating exercises off the ice) or a cardio session that typically goes for a half hour to an hour. Do some recovery stuff and then eat lunch around noon and rest until our second training session which is either another ice session, weight session or cardio session. That typically lasts an hour or two. After that, I’ll head home, eat dinner, recover, and get ready to do it all over the next day.

How do you work to achieve your daily goals?

At different points in the season we work on different areas of fitness, technique and strength to improve our ability on the ice. Most of my time is spent planning, training, studying nutrition, studying film, recovering, or doing something that helps contribute to my success in my sport. I transformed a lot over the years in order to make sure my body is able to compete at the highest levels. After several injuries, I now have to pay attention and do all the right things in order to train on a daily basis and compete when I need to.

What is your favorite workout or fitness trend?

I really enjoy cycling. This is my favorite thing to do besides skate. I spend hours on the bike a week as this is one of the main facets of training that contributes to my fitness on the ice.

What’s the most grueling work out you’ve ever done? Running park loops in Los Angeles at Kenneth Hahn Recreation Area. Each loop takes around 15 minutes and we run a total of 4 loops at max effort. I reach my max heart rate during this workout of 204 bpm.

What would people be surprised to learn about training for the Olympics?

There is a lot of downtime and rest that goes into the daily routine of being an athlete. Recovery is just as important if not more important than training, especially the older you get, so a lot of time is spent taking care of small injuries, or nuisances that potentially could take you out of training.

Have you ever been seriously injured? What did it take for you to come back from that injury? Injury has been a big part of my journey in my sport. I have been injured several times during my career and I would say a couple of them define who I am as an athlete. The cut to my leg before the Olympics in 2010 was single handedly the hardest situation I've ever been through, physically and mentally. It took a whole team of dedicated supporters (doctors, trainers, family, friends, coaches, teammates) to help lift me up off the ground and get me back to competing at a high level again. It took hours and hours in the rehab room, pool, and on the ice as a part of my recovery. A couple of my injuries occurred right in the middle of my season which took me out of very important competitions, a lot of discouragement comes from injuring yourself at important times, so the biggest part of my fight has been mental, trying to overcome the obstacles in my mind before I tackle them physically.

What does a typical day of eating look like during training? I eat pretty normal. No frills. My philosophy is eating food that comes from the earth and that's all natural. I tend to stay away from processed foods until I reach the off season or I want to indulge after a hard week of training.

If you are to indulge, what’s your go-to snack?

Ice cream is my vice along with chocolate cream pie and Oreos.
What is your earliest memory of doing or seeing skating?

My earliest memory was at age 3, walking around with my fisher price plastic skates on, accompanied by my mom and dad. This brought a lot of joy to me early on. I really enjoyed the feeling on my skates. Creating pressure into either the pavement, wood or ice in order to create speed. This is a strange concept to anyone that skates. Pushing sideways in order to go straight is one that I still feel like I haven't mastered. This is why I keep going. To try and perfect what I do every single day and lap I skate.

What's your earliest or favorite memory of watching the Olympics?

My earliest memory was watching Michael Johnson win Gold in both the 200m and 400m in Atlanta 96. It stuck out to me because of the Gold shoes he wore and the single hoop gold earring. He was a beast.

Was there a specific “breakthrough” moment/competition when you finally realized you could compete in your sport at a high enough level to reach the Olympics?
The 2009 World Championships in Vienna was my breakthrough competition. I was consistent in my results, winning several medals and placing 2nd overall to a field that was my main competition during the Olympics the next season. This gave me a lot of confidence that I was on the right track.

What's something cool, weird intense about your sport that people don't normally see? What's the hardest part of your sport?

Everyone has their own routines before the race so it's pretty funny watching people do the same thing over and over, either in the heat box or in warm up. The hardest part is losing. We spend every day trying to be the best we can be and when we come up short, it's hard to accept right away.

Are there any misconceptions about your sport that you would like to clear up?

Short track although there is a lot of luck involved, skill definitely overtakes luck when it comes to winning 9 times out of 10. You can't say that people win in this sport because of luck. A lot of times it's about being in the right place at the right time and putting yourself in a position to win.

Who is your coach? How long have you been working together and what's your relationship like?

Anthony Barthell and Alex Izykowski. I've been working with these guys on and off for the past few years. We grew up in similar times in the sport as they both competed before coaching. I consider them friends before coaches. They help push me to work harder every day.

Who do you socialize with most within your sport or any sport?

Definitely my teammates. We are out there on the ice and in training grinding it out wanting to achieve the same thing so there's a lot of respect for the amount of effort we put into it. Having people out there to push you and make you better in the same time helping each other reach goals is a beautiful thing.

Have you ever worked with a sports psychologist? If so, how did it help you?

Yes. Sports psychology is a very important element in my game. Although I might not have the physical capability I once had due to injury and age, working on my mind is where I can bridge the gap. There are several areas to improve mentally in order to give myself an edge over my competition. A lot of it is repetition and when there's new circumstances, being able to adapt and not let emotions get in the way.

What’s the best piece of advice you’ve ever received?
My dad always used to tell me "If you want it bad enough, you'll find a way. If you don't, you'll find an excuse."

What's a big obstacle that you've overcome in your life?

Growing up, I was always interested in a lot of different things. Whether it is music, film, food, I always wanted to try different things and exercise my creative mind. This affected my focus in skating sometimes. I wasn't always completely dedicated to the sport, and found myself a lot of the times wanting to experience something different. I quit a couple times because of this. It wasn't until recent times that I was able to give skating my 100% focus. This was definitely a big obstacle.

What is your biggest fear when competing?

That I won't have what it takes to achieve my goals.

Who is your Olympic role model?

The men's Paralympic sled hockey team. I had a chance to meet a bunch of these guys and every one of their stories resonates with me. The obstacles they've had to overcome in their lives not only to play their sport, but just to survive and live is something that everyone needs to hear.

Within your sport, who has been your greatest influence and why?
Wilma Boomstra, my coach from the time I was 14. She has always been there for me, through thick and thin. She raised me in the sport and continues to work with me to this day. She's seen me in my lowest points and still knows I have what it takes to succeed.

What athlete in any sport has been your greatest source of inspiration?
Manny Pacquiao. He stays humble through victory and defeat. He electrifies the crowd and makes his fans proud of what he does in the ring.

What advice would you give to a young child just starting out in short track?
Hard work and dedication are only a couple qualities you need to have in order to reach your goals. Patience, consistency, and understanding that things aren't going to happen overnight will ultimately get you where you want to go. Growing in skating means growing in life, they both go hand in hand, and experience in each will contribute to your success on and off the ice.

Who is your biggest rival? Is it friendly or contentious?
There are a handful of people from different countries. I don't really have "beef" with anyone; it's mostly cordial as we race each other so many times. I definitely have a couple people on my radar going into the next season.

Have you become close friends with any competitors from other countries? Any from South Korea?
I'm pretty close to a couple skaters I grew up with in the sport. Victor Knoch and Jack Whelbourne. We started on the International scene around the same time and stay in touch. I also grew up racing Lee Jung-su and Kwak Yoon-gy, and they are definitely some of my favorite people to race.

What was the best part of living in the Athletes' Village during the Games?
The Athletes' Village in Vancouver was ridiculously nice: million-dollar condos that we inhabited for a couple weeks before they were sold after the Olympics. There was a barn type building with pool tables and video games. Cool for the social aspect as you ran into several different athletes in different sports and got to make friends.

Are you a fan of any professional sports teams?

My favorite sport is football. I'm a Seahawks fan until I'm in the grave, have been since I was born. I also enjoy watching and playing golf. Relaxing and challenging all at the same time.

Do you play any other sports?

Golf.

Which Summer Olympic/Paralympic event would you like to try?

Ski jumping.

Who was the most influential in helping you achieve your dreams?

My parents were the most influential people in my life when it came to pursuing my sport. They provided me with everything I needed to succeed. Drove me to practice, competitions, bought the equipment, paid for ice time, travel, and everything else you could think of. They also allowed me to move to California when I was 14 years old in order to get the training I needed to succeed.

Did anyone ever tell you that you wouldn't be able to succeed in your sport? How were you able to overcome that?

No, no one has ever told me I couldn't do anything in my life. I have been surrounded with the best family and friends one could ever ask for and all are completely supportive of what I do.

Where do you keep your Olympic medals?

My mom and dad hold on to my medals. They love showing people and telling the stories of how they came about.

What is your favorite perk of being an elite Olympic athlete?

Being able to train every day. It's such a good lifestyle. I'm able to stay healthy, eat pretty much what I want, and workout for a living. What more could you ask for? Also, traveling is pretty good. We get to go to a lot of cool places around the world and see things I definitely wouldn't have made it out to on my own.

What are your pre-competition rituals?

I have to get a haircut before I travel anywhere. I bring along the same foods and supplements that I eat at home. I always put my left skate on first.

Do you have a nickname?

Celskeet from my friends down in Long Beach, CA. This was my gamer tag when we played counterstrike back in high school. Nasty, from my friends in Salt Lake. I'd prefer not to share the story on this one. Mowgli from my coach Wilma. She thinks I look like him and act the same way.
Do you have any hidden talents?

Juggling, playing guitar.

Do you have any tattoos?

A chest tattoo of the Filipino Sun and Stars surrounding the Polish Eagle. I got this along with my two brothers to show respect to our ancestry.

Do you collect anything?

I used to collect coins when I was a kid. Now I collect beer bottle caps. I enjoy drinking beer from around the world, not in volume of course. My favorite being Belgian Trappist ales.

What is your favorite animal?

Penguins

What charities do you support? How did you become involved?

I am part of Classroom Champions. I got a call from Steve Mesler one day to talk about the organization and I really liked the idea of it. It wasn't until a couple years after that I got set up through a friend to be a part of it.

If you were not an athlete, what would you be doing?

Film production.

When you have time off, what would constitute a perfect day for you?

Sleep in until 10 am. Get my backpacking supplies ready along with my fiancée and a couple friends. Drive out to a spot, hike in, set up camp. Fish and cook some food. Chill out and listen to some tunes. Make a fire, eat some more, makes s'mores and post up around the fire.

How do you unwind after a competition?

I typically just like to do something different for a while, especially during the offseason. I really enjoy traveling, so I tend to do that a bunch. Road trips are always nice. Seeing family and friends I'm not able to see is a plus. And sleeping in always feels good for more than 1 day in a row.

Do you have any fears?

Cockroaches. Don't do it.

Do you like to travel? What has been the most special place you have traveled to and why?

My favorite country to travel to is Belgium. They have it figured out there, great food, drinks and people are friendly. I also really like Japan. It's cleanliness, and food are on point.

What's something quirky about yourself that people would be amused to learn?

I have a thing for house plants.
What's your personal motto?

Everybody is going to face challenges, what defines you is how you overcome them.

What are some of your hobbies?

Bouldering: I climb with my friends at the local gym at least twice a week. I got into it pretty recently but I love the challenge of it and the social aspect.

Golf: I learned from my Grandpa before he passed. I love this game because of the mental aspect. You really have to calm your mind in order to play well.

Backpacking: I go during the spring and summer along with some friends. We usually go around Utah, the High Uintas. I like it because it's a true escape from the daily routine.

Cinematography: I love film, enjoy watching it and enjoy the feeling you can derive from it.

What is your music of choice while training?


Do you have any celebrity crushes?

Kate Mara.

Outside of training for your sport, what physical routine makes you feel your best?

Bouldering at the gym and playing golf. Both help me work on my mental game for relaxation and challenge.

What are five must-have items you always keep in your gym bag?

Headphones, charger for headphones, water, protein bar, protein drink

Have you been to South Korea before? What are you most looking forward to about the Games being hosted in South Korea? Anything you want to see or do?

Yes, I love South Korea. The landscape, food and culture are great. I look forward to my sport as South Koreans love short track and I know it's going to be the most exciting sport in the Games. I'm looking forward to the food and energy of the Games.

Do you like kimchi or any other Korean foods?

Everything about Korean food. Sundubu-Jjigae, Galbi, Bulgogi, Japchae, Bibimbap are a few favorites.

Have you ever done karaoke? What’s your go-to karaoke song?

Yes, anything R. Kelly or Outkast is my go to.
What will success look like for you in PyeongChang? What are your goals?

Olympic gold.
A 17-year-old Virginia skater is the first black woman to qualify for the U.S. Olympic speedskating team.

Maame Biney, of Reston, Virginia, secured her spot on the team after she made history winning the 500-meter races at the U.S. Olympic Short Track Trials on Dec. 16.

The bubbly skater flew past the competition and then fell as she celebrated.

Of course, she got right back up.

Biney says she owes her determination to her Ghana-born father. She is grateful for how much he has sacrificed and the amount of work he put into her success, she said.

The Olympian's father, Kweku Biney, moved with her to the U.S. in 2005 in an effort to give his daughter a better future. They had to leave behind other family members to begin their new life.

"My journey was never easy. It was hard, but I made it," Kweku Biney said.

Although Biney credits her father for her many accomplishments, he refuses to take it. "God saw me through it," he said. "He planned it all. I was just the facilitator. That’s all I can say," he continued.

Perhaps there was some destiny involved. Curing an interview with News4, Kweku held out a business card that his daughter had never seen. Maame grabbed it, looked and laughed. It was a reminder card for her first group skating lesson, her dad said, that was scheduled for Dec. 17, 2005. Exactly 12 years and one day later, she would qualify for the Olympics.

Biney's icy ride began at six years old. When her father saw a “learn to skate” sign at SkateQuest in Reston, he initially signed Biney up for figure skating.

A few months into the lessons, Biney’s coach noticed she skated too fast for figure skating and mentioned she should try speedskating. Her coach was onto something.

Twelve years later, the high school senior is part of history and the Olympic team.

Although originally from Ghana, Biney wants to represent the U.S. because of the country's diversity.

"This is what this country is. It’s diverse and different, and that’s exactly why I’m representing the U.S. Because we’re different."

As Biney prepares for her first Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea, she believes the sacrifices she’s made for speedskating were worth it.

"Even with all the hard work, all the crying, all the tears, I would do it again because I had double the laughter."
Biney is the second African-American speedskater to represent Team USA at the Olympics, following in the footsteps of Shani Davis. Davis has since made three more Olympic teams and earned four medals, including two golds.
Road to the Olympics: Thomas Hong Returns Home


PARK CITY, UT (Nexstar) — For many Olympic hopefuls, the thought of making the trek to PyeongChang South Korea is daunting for the distance alone—almost 6,000 miles. But for one young speed skater, the chance to travel such a great distance to compete for Team USA means making a trip home.

Thomas Hong is a 20-year-old speed skater originally from South Korea, who moved to the United States with his family as a 5 year old.

Hong recognizes that he’s younger than some Olympic hopefuls, especially in the realm of speed skating. But Hong maintains that his age may help him in more ways than one.

“For me being young, not everyone knows exactly my capabilities and stuff like that. So there’s definitely some underestimating there,” Hong said. “I can sneak up on people.”

And sneak up he has.

Hong, at 17 years old, was the youngest speed skater at the 2014 Olympic Trials, where he placed 11th overall.

Since then, Hong has won silver at the World Junior Speed Skating Championships. He's also a six-time national champion in his age group.

Hong said he began skating at 5 years old, when his education in the sport began. He said he has been learning ever since.

“Everyone’s doing the same thing. What can you do better than your competitors?” Hong asked. “Learning who you are in the sport.”

Hong began learning who he was in the sport upon his arrival to America, when he began skating not necessarily to become an Olympian, but just to make new friends.

“And for some reason we knew somebody in the area and they happened to be doing short track speed skating. And it was just another way for us to get to know the community,” Hong said.

Hong has hopes to make it to South Korea not only to prove to himself that he can do it, but to show others who still live there.

Hong’s dad still lives in South Korea, and the skater says having his family there to watch could make the moment even sweeter.

“Just having familiar eyes watch me, I think that'll definitely give me a spark,” Hong said.

Before this dream can become reality for Thomas Hong, he has to actually qualify for the Olympics. The Olympic Trials for short track speed skating are in Salt Lake City in December, where Hong plans to sneak up and steal a spot on Team USA.

In this web extra video, Thomas Hong talks about why he loves speed skating.
Two short track speedskaters from the Washington D.C. suburbs qualified to represent the United States in the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics.

At the team trials in Kearns, Utah over the weekend, 17-year-old Maame Biney became the first black woman to qualify for an American Olympic speedskating team. Biney was born in Ghana but moved to the U.S. when she was 5. She trained at the Dominion Speedskating Club in Reston, Virginia.

“It’s crazy awesome,” Biney told NBC just after her qualifying race. “I am just so happy right now.” Then, she keeled over with giggles.

Thomas Hong, 20, of Laurel, Maryland, qualified for the men’s team. He is a South Korea native, but has been skating with the Potomac Speedskating Club since he was 4. His grandmother used to take him to his practices, where he became a kind and thoughtful leader on the ice.

“Thomas is probably the nicest guy you’ll ever meet,” said John Sullivan, the president of Potomac Speedskating. “He’s just really a great ambassador for the sport, and for our club, and really the D.C. region.”

The club sent four athletes to Utah for the team trials: Hong, Aaron Heo, Shaner LeBauer, and Brandon Kim. At 16, Kim was the youngest skater to participate in the trials.

The two will head to South Korea for the Olympics in early February.
Family helps pave John-Henry Krueger’s journey to Olympics


This holiday season, the most fulfilling parts of life for America’s great Olympic short-track speedskating hope come in rapid bursts of intensity — blink and he’ll miss them. The journeys that follow take a lot longer.

Last weekend John-Henry Krueger, 22, scorched the ice at the United States Olympic trials in Salt Lake City to book his place at February’s Winter Games, four years after his dreams of a spot in Sochi were crushed by swine flu contracted a day before the qualifier.

This time, his mother Heidi sat watching intently, eyes glued to the glistening, treacherous surface. The scene unfolding before her was one of dominance. Krueger was peerless at Kearns Olympic Oval, winning four of six events (each of short-track’s three distances were skated twice) and never placing worse than third, to finish on top of the points standings by a street.

Yet if Krueger’s status as an Olympic medal contender is built on raw speed and flawless technique, what came next was a test of endurance. Mother and son shared a drive that slogged its way from Salt Lake, through the sleepy roads of Wyoming and Nebraska and seven other states, back to the family’s home in the Peters Township area of Pittsburgh.

“The road trip has basically been me trying to distract my mom’s eyes from the speedometer so I can go as fast as humanly possible,” Krueger laughed, during a telephone conversation with USA TODAY Sports early in the journey. “I am known for overestimating my strengths during long trips. I think ‘oh, we can do the whole (1,844-mile) drive in one sitting, no problem’, then I drive four hours and I am like ‘OK, let’s rethink.’”

On Monday night the Kruegers made it to Omaha, slept a few hours, then woke at 4 a.m. to complete the mission.

There was a practical reason for the drive. When you’re in your early 20s it’s not easy to rent a car and get it insured without paying an exorbitant cost. So, when Krueger needed to spend a month training in Salt Lake before trials, his mom brought his 2011 black Toyota Camry out for him to use. Traversing the country twice in such fashion was an extreme display of love and support, but it’s not a surprise. Meet the Kruegers and you soon find out they’ll do anything for their kids, both John-Henry and his older brother Cole, also an outstanding Olympic-bound skater who moved to Hungary and competes for that nation.

Waiting at home was father Bryan, who opted against journeying to Utah as the stresses of major competition get his nerves jangling. It is easy to see why. Short-track’s appeal and entertainment lies in its unpredictability and inherent danger and even the most seasoned campaigner can fall afoul of rotten luck or simple misjudgment. During trials triple Olympic medalist J.R. Celski tumbled to the ice no fewer than four times.

Bryan is a corporate accountant, Heidi a figure skating coach, and while they are comfortably off, speed skating at elite levels can be painfully expensive. Skate blades alone can run into thousands of dollars. Major corporate sponsorships for the sport are tough to come by even in an Olympic year, and next to impossible at other times. Krueger’s costs are increased by opting to follow his own training path, basing himself first in South Korea and now the Netherlands on the advice of former U.S. national team coach Jae Su Chun.
“If I was in the U.S. program training would be free,” Krueger said. “But there is only one opportunity in your life to not only be a professional athlete but to be at your peak performance. Everywhere I travel all over the world is part of the bigger picture of trying to reach my maximum potential. Trying to find what works best for me.”

The time away from home has had a twofold effect of improving his skating power and forcing him to grow up in a hurry. It shows. “John-Henry’s greatest strength is his maturity and that is because of the experiences he has had and the people he has worked with,” said Hall of Famer Jack Mortell, who has held an abundance of positions within the sport and who gave Krueger off-ice guidance last weekend.

Mortell pointed out that Krueger’s trials performance was doubly impressive given that he didn’t have a coach at ice level calling out in-race tactical advice.

The Kruegers don’t get to see their sons anywhere near as much as they’d all like. Cole can’t come home this year as Hungary’s squad still has spots up for grabs. Having John-Henry around during the festive season is a rare treat for his parents, but comes with a bittersweet twist far less tasty than one of Heidi’s famed pumpkin spice cookies. The trip will be cut short, much like a short-track race that begins with a perfect start before being hastily ended with an untimely collision.

“I get to have the boys home so infrequently so I am thrilled for whatever amount of time I get,” Heidi Krueger said. “But it won’t be long…(sigh)…before we have to jump in the car and go.”
A black woman is now on the U.S. Olympic speedskating team. Maame Biney recently qualified for the 2018 Winter Olympics — making her the first black woman and only the second black speedskater to ever join the U.S. team.

The 17-year-old is originally from Ghana.

"Since speedskating or any ice sport isn't an option back in Africa, I would just tell all the little kids back there just to find something that you love," Biney told Voice of America.

Biney grew up in Virginia, where she first got into figure skating. Her speed got her some attention.

"The first day she got on the ice, I was scared, you know. I thought she was going to break her head open," said Biney's father, Kweku Biney.

So just how fast is Biney? Fast enough to beat former Olympians in a qualifying round. And as of the qualifying races, her personal best for 500 meters — or just over 0.3 miles — is 43.161 seconds.

Biney and the rest of the team will compete in South Korea this winter.
Aaron Tran continues short-track skating legacy that started at Federal Way rink


Olympic short-track speedskaters Apolo Ohno and J.R. Celski both began their careers inline skating at Pattison's West skating rink in Federal Way. That legacy is continuing with a third Olympic athlete that began his career at that rink -- Aaron Tran.

Since he was nine years old watching the 2006 Winter Games, Tran has dreamed of becoming an Olympic short-track speed skater.

At the Olympic Trials in December, many considered Tran a long-shot to make the U.S. team, but Tran believed and punched his ticket to PyeongChang.

"Starting when we were young, we were looking at these athletes like 'Oh, my God. How would it feel to represent USA on the world stage?' And now it's just awesome knowing that we've just been working every day and all of a sudden you are there," Tran said.

Tran fell just short of qualifying for the team four years ago at age 17. That just motivated him to work harder.

"It hurts every day. Sometimes on the ice, I'm just like 'Why? Can I just stand up now? You just feel it in your legs. It just really sucks sometimes, but you got to do that to get better," Tran said.

The work has paid off. He was the junior overall national champion in 2015 and has competed on four world junior championships teams.

But now he gets the chance to compete on skating's biggest stage against the world's best.

"It still feels surreal. I'm just doing the same thing I've been doing since I was young. I've still been training hard every day and just focusing on all the little things and, eventually, all these little things add up, and eventually, I'm here."

Tran's next goal is to win his first Olympic medal, then he dreams of someday becoming one of the greatest short-track skaters of all time. Until then, he just wants to make sure all his family and friends in Federal Way know he misses them.

"My mom, you're awesome. My dad. Sister. Roxy, my dog. You cant understand me, but you are awesome, too," Tran said.

Tran will compete in the 500 and 1000 meter events and is eligible to race on the relay team.

If Tran races the relay, he will do so along with Celski. Both Tran and Celski went to Illahee Middle School and Todd Beamer High School.
United Turns Team USA Athletes, Employees Into Winter Games Superheroes

http://nysportsjournalism.squarespace.com/united-has-olympic-superheroes/?SSScrollPosition=50

By Barry Janoff

January 18, 2018: United, the official airline for the U.S. Olympic Committee and Team USA, knows about flying and other feats of strength, and has morphed the six members of Team United as well as employees of United into people who use their skills to make extraordinary things happen.

The multi-platform campaign, under the umbrella “Superheroes,” breaks with about four weeks to go to the start of the Winter Games in South Korea.

According to United, “‘Superheroes’ celebrates the six U.S. Olympic and Paralympic athletes sponsored by United and their extraordinary moves on the slopes and ice, as well as six United employees selected to represent the 90,000 United team members who go above and beyond to get customers to their destinations safely, comfortably and on time.”

The campaign will run on TV (including during NBC’s coverage of the Games Feb. 8-25 and Paralympic Games March 8-18), online, print, outdoor, in airports and on-board United aircraft throughout the Games.

An online element “unlocks” trading cards of Team United in superhero garb.

Lead agency is McGarryBowen.

The six members of Team United have been bestowed with superhero names and powers, including:

• Gus Kenworthy aka Air Raider (freeskier): “His power of flight is only matched by his perpetual chase of the origins of winter and how to harness its energy.”

• Jamie Anderson aka Arctic Angel (snowboarder): “Protector of the mountains' most precious resource, fresh powder.”

• J.R. Celski aka Ice Lightning (speedster): “Quicker than a bolt in a storm . . . a blur for even those with the keenest eye.”

• Erin Hamlin’ aka The Rocket (luger): “Power of speed and invisibility leaves the competition at the starting line.”

• Nathan Chen aka King Quad (figure skater): “Can take any material and spin it into gold.”

• Nikko Landeros aka The Fury (Paralympic sled hockey): Defender of all that need preservation . . . brings his power of intensity to the ice in search of the coveted trio of gold.”

"The tie between superheroes and Team USA athletes is clear — they are regular people who use their exceptional talents to accomplish the incredible," Mark Krolick, vp-marketing for United Airlines, said in a statement.

"For close to four decades, our employees have called upon their unique skills — transporting hundreds of thousands of customers every day, while working in rapidly changing weather conditions
and providing exceptional service — to give the ‘power of flight’ to Team USA athletes, getting them to competitions around the globe.”

The members of United Airlines participating in the campaign also have been granted superhero names and powers, including:

• “Sky Runner” Nancy Barteczko, a Chicago-based pilot “who soars gracefully at cruising altitude, only touching down to deliver passengers to their destinations across the globe.”

• “Departicus” Lemont Penn, customer service rep at LAX and “guardian of all those making passage, day or night.”

• "Winged Wonder” Karla Gonzales De La Torre, a flight attendant based in New York/Newark “with the ultimate triumvirate of powers: safety, hydration and fuel.”

• “Agent Cargo” Craig Cosentino, ramp/baggage worker at SFX “with the strength of a thousand people.”

• “Storm Tamer” Michael Murgaditchian, a Chicago operations expert “capable of parting even the most menacing clouds to grant safe passage for all on board.”

• “Directionator,” Chicago-based wing-walker Michael Turner who “uses his power of navigation and glowing orbs of exploration to guide planes to their gates.”

United has gone all-in with the Hollywood superhero creative, with the campaign directed by Martin Campbell (GoldenEye, Casino Royale) and music composer Brian Tyler (The Avengers, Iron Man, The Fast and the Furious franchises).
Michigan native, Olympic speed skater Ryan Pivirotto has local ties in Midland, Clio


MIDLAND, Mich-- Ryan Pivirotto and his mother Carolyn Pivirotto say anytime they were in Michigan visiting friends and family over the years, Ryan would spend time practicing with the Midland Speedskating Club. One of the coaches there helped him be the skater he is today.

Ryan has only been skating for seven years, but has quickly made a splash in the world of speed skating. He's lived everywhere from Connecticut, DC to Seoul, South Korea chasing his dream.

He's now in Salt Lake City, Utah where the US Speed Skating team is currently doing high altitude training. Ryan has many accomplishments under his belt including being a member of the 2014 Junior World team with some members of his current Olympic team. His mom says it's been a journey, but they couldn't be more excited.

Ryan says he won't know if he's competing until the days before the event, but if he does, it will likely be in the men's 1000 meter and relay team. The team heads for South Korea at the end of the month.

Ryan has an aunt and uncle that live in Clio who are rooting him on and shared the story with NBC25 and FOX66.
WASHINGTON — Over the years, the D.C. area has become home for many Olympic athletes in water sports such as swimming and canoeing. This apparently applies to frozen water, too.

Two of the eight spots on the Olympic short-track speedskating team belong to locals: Thomas Hong (Laurel, Maryland) and Maame Biney (Reston, Virginia) have revealed the so-called “DMV” as USA’s speedskating capital as well.

“The D.C. area is the hotbed of talent in the United States,” said Nathaniel Mills, a three-time former Olympian and captain of the 1998 U.S. Olympic speedskating team.

Mills added that the D.C. area not only produced one quarter of the short-track speedskating team, but more than half of the 32 racers in the Olympic trials are from this area.

Mills is a big reason for this phenomenon. In 2002, he founded DC-ICE, an inner-city program in Fort Dupont designed to introduce young children to skating. This program — which he still runs as head coach — has also served as the foundation for a successful speedskating career.

“We focus on Olympic values and teaching general skating skills,” Mills said of his program. “If the kids and parents want to commit, they’re guided toward a local speedskating program, or even hockey and figure skating.”

Biney came through the DC-ICE program before honing her skills with Dominion Speedskating Club in Reston. It was there she grew and developed into the first African-American woman to make the U.S. speedskating team.

“All the kids that come out of this area set themselves apart nationally because they work so hard,” Mills added. “They spend a lot more hours on the ice, they spend more hours off-ice training, their workouts are harder — that’s the main thing.”

The kids’ intensity must be matched by the parents’. Jane Lute, whose daughter Kamryn has skated at Dominion with Biney since 2010, said it’s a full family commitment for these kids to pursue their dreams.

“Our kids get up at 3:30 in the morning to get on the ice by 4:30, because that’s the only available time,” Lute said. “Other clubs are skating late at night and at odd hours, particularly during the hockey season … so the ice times are not ideal. And traffic being what it is in Washington, D.C., you have to be committed.”

Hong himself recognizes the confluence of factors that go into why there are so many great speedskaters in this area. “There’s several clubs that are very competitive within the area. I can’t qualify or quantify the real reason behind our success, but I would just say it’s driven athletes, driven parents, hiring coaches who really understand the sport, and just the desire to get better.”

Hong grew up in Howard County and went to Atholton High School, but he was born in South Korea — a region that has everything to do with the speedskating boom around the District.

To read the rest of the article in its entirety, click here.
Northbrook Mom Remembers Olympian Daughter's Start in Glenview


GLENVIEW, IL — The mom of a local Olympian is getting ready to head to South Korea for the trip of a lifetime. Debbie Gehring, of Northbrook, will be watching her youngest daughter, Lana, compete in her second Olympics next month in Pyeongchang.

"It's a lot of fun and a total adrenaline rush," Gehring laughed. "I think I get more worn out after these meets, just watching them."

Lana Gehring, 27, qualified to skate in the 500, 1,000 and 1,500 meter short track races last month at the U.S. Olympic Trials in Utah. Lana has a bronze medal from her appearance at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics, but she retired for a time after missing out in 2014.

"Lana hasn't competed internationally in like three years. So, just making the team, to me, that was the big thing. Anything else is icing on the cake. We'll see how it goes. The Koreans have the hometown advantage," she said.

Growing up in Glenview, Lana Gehring's first steps on the ice were at the Glenview Ice Center, where her older sister was already skating, according to her mom.

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Debbie explained says she signed up her then four-year-old daughter for a twice-weekly figure skating class to get some exercise over the winter months.

Lana kept figure skating in Glenview for four years and participated in all the local ice shows.

"She was a flower one year," Debbie recalls with a smile.

Debbie said skating just seemed to come easily to her daughter, who was always well-coordinated and balanced.

Plus, having a figure skating background helped Lana excel quickly with power skating maneuvers and taught her skating basics like crossovers from her time at the Glenview Ice Center.

"She just really liked going fast," said Gehring.

At age 15, Lana moved to Salt Lake City to pursue her speed skating career. In Utah, she lived in her own apartment and would walk to and from school, the ice rink and the store.

On the ice, her helmet what has become Lana's signature look. Her hair is shaved on one side, revealing a tattoo of a crown with her initials. She got the tattoo in 2012, he mom said.

"2012 was a fantastic year for Lana. She took home several gold medals at the World Cups and a bronze medal at World Championships. So the tattoo symbolizes her accomplishments," she said.

"I'm very proud of her," Debbie said.
Melvindale native to compete in her second Olympic Games


MELVINDALE, Mich. - Jessica Kooreman has spent her life in skates, first inline then on ice.

Kooreman is one of the top female short track athletes for Team USA, and this February the Melvindale native will compete in her second Olympic games.

"I wanted to have one more chance to be able to be a part of it. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for sure," Kooreman said. "I want to go there, I want to represent my country, I want to feel proud and I don't want to have any regrets of not going there and not having my second chance at being on that stage and being able to live it to the fullest."

She qualified for the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics during the last race of the Olympic trials in December. A collision in the final lap of the 1,000-meter race nearly kept her from qualifying, but she got up and finished the race a distant third -- it was enough to make her one of three female short track speed skaters to represent the U.S. at the Olympics.

"I just kept replaying the crash and watching her get up and see how much strength she had over the other girl, because the other girl was just exhausted and I mean, she showed me that she had good endurance," said Richard Smith, Jessica's father.

Kooreman has been racing since she was 2 years old. Her inline speed skating career got her to the top of the podium at world championships, but to compete in the Olympics, she had to compete on ice. In 2008, she made the switch and found herself on the podium again by 2012. She won a silver in the 3,000-meter relay.

While she just missed qualifying for the 2010 Olympics, she did qualify for the 2014 games in Sochi, Russia. She finished fourth in the 1,000-meter race and sixth in the 1,500-meter. She is excited to return to the Olympics a second time and compete. She remembers her previous Olympic experience fondly.

"Going there knowing that the world is watching you at that moment, it definitely opens your eyes to want to show up for that day and perform and represent your country," Kooreman said. "I think just seeing all these flags, you walk into the village and you see flags from every different country staring you in the face and you want your flag to stand proud, you want yours to be the bold one and you want to represent our country to the fullest."

Kooreman's family is incredibly supportive of her speed skating career. Her parents both say their daughter works very hard for what she wants, and they never had to push her to go to practice.

She and her younger brother, Travis, are very close.

"I think she has the heart for it so I don't see why she can't accomplish her goal of getting a gold medal," Travis Smith said.

Kooreman is proud of her Detroit roots. She says everyone from the area is hard working and she believes it helped get her where she is today.
"My family, my dad's a truck driver, my mom's a barber, and it's just metal in the area, hard core and you know nobody knows nothing less than working hard and grit," Kooreman said.

"She deserves everything she's got and she worked for it and we're all proud of her and I'm just so happy that she got to pursue her dreams," said Reina Smith, Jessica's mom.

When Kooreman travels to South Korea to compete, she will be accompanied by her husband, Mike Kooreman. He is from Michigan, a former speed skater and a team leader for the US Olympic speed skating team. He also plays a very important role on Jessica's team.

"I'm her blade technician, her sports psychologist, coach sometimes, husband sometimes, so yeah I've got a few different hats that I'm wearing these days," Mike Kooreman said.

Mike Kooreman is also the program manager at the Utah Olympic Oval where Jessica trains.

"To have him there pushing me and to also be a part of what I'm doing training wise day in and day out, I'm just thankful that I actually have him involved in my life and that he is as strong minded as he is and willing to support me like he does," Kooreman said.

The three-member women's team includes Kooreman, Lana Gehring, who competed in the 2010 Olympics and newcomer Maame Biney. According to Team USA, Kooreman, 34, is the oldest short track speed skater to compete in the Olympics in 20 years.
Olympic speed skater Maame Biney wants to win gold. She's already won hearts


Kearns, Utah (CNN) As Maame Biney laces up her skates for one of her last practices before heading to the Winter Olympics, her mind drifts to her upcoming 18th birthday -- and the prospect of her first cell phone.

"Dad says he's going to get me one," she says, her permagrin on full display.

Rocking a jacket from the World Junior Short Track Speed Skating Championships in Austria, where his daughter snared bronze in the 500-meter, Kweku Biney leans against the protective padding surrounding the rink. Montell Jordan plays over the loudspeakers.

A single father, Kweku Biney has long been there for his daughter -- from the time she landed at Dulles after leaving her native Ghana at age 5 till now, as she makes final preparations for the PyeongChang Games. On February 10, when she becomes the first African-American woman to represent the United States in Olympic speed skating, he'll be there, too.

Maame -- pronounced "MAH-may" -- spins toward her fellow skaters, which include three-fifths of the men's Olympic short-track team. "You all just heard that!"

They needle their teammate. Heard what? They didn't hear anything. She tries to pull a reporter into her camp. Surely, someone heard it!

Kweku Biney's smile widens.

"Did I say that? No one heard it," he says, laughing.

As Maame continues her preparations, strapping on her helmet and an "E.T." glove with carbon-fiber bulbs at the tips of each finger, her father confides in the reporter.

"Phones get them in trouble, but she's mature," he says. "Eighteen, you know?"

'A Maame laugh ... settles everyone down'

With power that belies her youth, Maame is America's best hope for a medal in the 500 meters. She also qualified for the 1,500, but her specialty is the shorter race. Maame jumps off the line like a sprinter, scrambling for the critical inside position. The E.T. glove gives her just enough leverage to glide through the turns, her shoulder maybe 2 feet from the ground.

It doesn't take long to finish four-and-a-half laps of 111.111 meters each. If you're watching, go to the bathroom at your own risk.

Coach Anthony Barthell, who's known Maame since she was 11, said she was a "powerful little girl," oozing natural talent. Taller and stronger than her peers, she's like no one he's ever coached, he said, but she still has plenty of work to do on her technique -- that "push" skaters use to propel themselves to speeds of around 30 mph.

At trials in December, she won the finals by more than a half second, an eternity in speed skating. Her time of 43.161 is just over eight-tenths of a second off the world record set by British skater Elise
Christie in 2016. At 18, Maame has ample time to close that gap. She beat her own personal best five or six times last year alone, Barthell said.

She has "maybe one or two more Olympics in her, possibly three," the coach told CNN.

Yet Maame's greatest contribution to Team USA isn't necessarily her athleticism. It may be her smile. We're not talking some impish simper, oh no. We're talking a toothy, 1,000-watt grin that blooms across most of her lower face.

Her positivity is boundless. Late last year, a Belgian skater's 17½-inch blade snapped, flew into her face and ripped into her lip and chin, requiring stitches. But Maame didn't dwell on that. She took to Instagram. "Who won? You guys should see the blade," she posted.

"I love having people smile and laugh because if you're smiling and laughing, then that means you're happy, and being happy ... is the best present you can ever give to anyone every single day, so I love doing that," she told CNN, a faint white battle scar on her chin.

Her hearty belly laugh, which resonates throughout the cavernous Olympic Oval, even over the Zamboni, plays into Barthell's practices.

"A Maame laugh, that just settles everyone down," he said after a recent practice. "If I see that she's tired and the morale's starting to go down -- the team, the chemistry's just a little low, the atmosphere's a little low for me -- I'll go up and crack a joke because I know it could be a horrible joke, but she's going to be the one that laughs and everyone else starts recovering a little easier."

Her demeanor hasn't changed much since she was an 11-year-old, said Barthell, who was named the US short track coach in 2016.

"I just remember her sitting there smiling and laughing and whenever I went to shake her hand, she just burst out laughing. That was my first impression of her, that she's just a happy-go-lucky kid, and she's still the same," he said. "If she's having a bad day, you can't really tell."

Maame said that at her high school in Reston, Virginia, where she calls home, she was known for "getting in trouble for laughing a lot." She said this while giggling.

That's been less of an issue her senior year. Since summer, she's been living with a host family while training for the 500 and 1,500 in Kearns, Utah, at a speed skating facility built for the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics. Though her father asked her to take a hiatus from school for the Olympics, she insisted on graduating with her friends.

She attends English and history classes, the final credits she needs for graduation, via videoconference. At competitions, she watches recordings of the classes. She does homework between training sessions and regularly emails her teachers at South Lakes High School.

"She's an A and B student. If she studies hard, she can make all As, but practice..." her father said, nodding toward the ice rink. "She's got to be a kid, too, sometimes, so I give her a pass."

From Accra to Reston

To say Maame's path to speed skating excellence was circuitous or unlikely is to sell it short. Kweku Biney, 59, left Accra, Ghana, in the 1980s, hitchhiking north through the Sahara Desert and eventually landing in Alicante, Spain -- almost 2,300 miles away as the crow flies.
He bopped around Europe for a while -- to Sweden, Denmark, Norway and France -- before flying to the States in 1984 and settling in Hyattsville, Maryland.

Now separated, Kweku had two kids with his wife: Maame and her little brother, Nana Kojo, 15, who still lives in Accra. Maame visited her dad for the first time in 2005. It didn't begin well.

As Kweku drove her from the airport to his home in Wheaton, Maryland, Maame began bawling. She wanted to go home.

He explained that she couldn't just get back on the plane: "I have to make certain things happen before you can do that."

She stopped crying and Kweku continued driving, only to stop 3 miles down the road to console her again. Then again on the Beltway. And again at home. He decided not to get out of the car and instead drove her to Wheaton Plaza Mall (now Westfield Wheaton).

"The first store we went into was JCPenney. This girl saw how big the store is. She was just running all over. 'Daddy, I like this one. No, no, daddy, I don't like this one. I like that thing over there,'" he recounted. "I just folded my arms, stood up and just watched her just run back and forth. She got tired and I just went and bought her a few things. She stopped crying, and that was it.

"The following day, this girl told me, 'Daddy, I'm not going back to Ghana.'"

Kweku Biney was making the commute to a government healthcare contractor in Reston, the same company that employs him today. He and Maame moved into a coworkers' basement to be closer to work and school, before finding an apartment in town.

'Let her go try speed skating'

About three months after Maame's introduction to an American mall, Kweku was driving near SkateQuest in Reston, where he saw a sign: "Learn to skate."

"Maame, do you want to try this?"

"What's that, daddy?"

"You know, just glide on the ice, move on the ice."

Maame responded with a blank look. Kweku didn't know much about skating, either. Soccer had always been his sport. But his daughter gave her dad a simple answer: "Yes."

"I don't think she really understood what I'm saying because she had never seen ice before," Kweku said. "I was really scared because I thought she was going to fall and then break her head open because where we are from, there's no ice. The only thing icy there is the cold beer."

Maame instantly fell in love with skating and "did it with ease," Kweku said. It wasn't long before an instructor told Kweku that Maame wasn't cut out for figure skating. She was too fast.

"Just let her go try speed skating," the instructor said.
The switch meant years of getting up before dawn on Saturdays. Kweku didn't appreciate his daughter's dedication to the sport until that third Saturday. He was bushed and didn't want to get up.

"She was 5 years old. She said, 'Daddy, it's Saturday morning. We have to go!' and I was like, 'Oh man, I thought she was going to be sleeping.' She wasn't. She woke me up. And then we went, and I said, 'OK.' I didn't miss any time anymore," the proud papa said. "She's been running away with this thing ever since."

There were times Kweku went hungry to make sure she ate. Pricey skates, lessons and equipment meant he was never able to put away much in savings.

"I came to America with nothing, so when I die, I'm not going to take anything with me, so hey, just spend it on her," he said.

Kweku thanks God for guiding him past that SkateQuest sign in 2005, and he thanks the United States for making Maame's story possible.

"Only in America, nowhere else," he said.

Asked how he feels about the political climate surrounding immigration, considering his immigrant daughter is set to proudly wear the red, white and blue in PyeongChang, he bristled. He doesn't want Maame to be a pawn in anyone's politics. They both love America. That's all you need to know.

"I told her to never get into politics. It's a dirty business," he said. "Sports, school, God -- that's it. No politics."

'Just normal Maame'

Ask Maame about her aspirations and, as nonchalantly as some high schoolers might speak of being a doctor one day, she'll say she wants to be a chemical engineer, world speed skating champion and Olympic gold medalist. No big deal.

"I really have an interest in making things explode, and I guess my dad, he told me a few years ago that he was into chemistry when he was a little kid, so I guess chemistry runs in the family," she said.

When she takes the ice later this month, she'll not only set precedent for African-American women, but she'll be one of only four foreign-born US Olympians, the second-ever African-born US Olympian and the second African-American speedskater on a US Olympics team. Her pal, Shani Davis, who's competing in his fifth Winter Olympics, was the first.

"It's a huge thing," she said, but she isn't hung up on the racial aspect of her accomplishments. "I have friends who accept me and who don't think of me as being an African-American," she said. "They just think of me as being normal Maame or being human."

To any youngsters her achievements might inspire, no matter their race, she has a message: "Go out there, find an ice arena or ice rink, and just skate and try it out. ... You never know. You could be the next Olympian, which is an awesome thing to be."

'It was a graceful fall'
Maame realizes she wouldn't be among the world's fastest speed skaters without her dad. She speaks to her mother in Ghana about once a week, but Kweku plays both roles here at home. It can be tough, especially at her age, she said.

"I like guys, and my dad, I'm always going to be his little girl, and I think it's a really awkward situation when you're like, 'Hey daddy, I like this guy. What do you think and stuff?' It's really hard to talk to him about it because he's like," she breaks into her best Kweku impression. "'No, you're going to get married when you're 50 years old.' All right, dad. OK. I see how it is."

But Kweku isn't one of these win-at-all-costs fathers. He wants only what's best for her and would prefer she worry about guys when she's done with school and skating, she said.

The day before she won the 500 at the Olympic trials, Maame had what she felt was a poor run in the 1,500. Where others might rejoice at finishing third and qualifying for an Olympic event, Maame has a tendency to get down on herself and worry that people won't like her unless she skates well, she said. Kweku knew what to say.

"No matter what happens tomorrow, whether you get last or whether you get first, just know that I love you not because you're a speed skater but because you're Maame and you're my daughter," he told her.

She went on to win the trials before falling onto her rump while pumping her fists in celebration. "It was a graceful fall," her dad said, beaming.

Biney giddily recounted the moment. "I was like, 'I made the team. Holy cow, I made the team! (Squeal!)' And then I cheered so hard that I fell."

The graceful tumble and her post-race interview charmed everyone who saw them. Despite her maturity and speed, it felt like she might never relinquish her youth.

On the Wednesday before leaving for PyeongChang, Maame attended a short practice before hitting the stationary bike. It was a recovery day, and she was looking forward to some rare downtime. Kweku reminded her she had dinner plans with her host family that evening. She has no driver's license, so he made sure she had transportation lined up.

She was headed to Park City to see a friend, she told him. Both of their birthdays are coming up, so they'd agreed to pay for each other's ticket, she said, laughing at the absurdity of it. They'll grab a bubble tea -- taro with vanilla for Maame -- before catching the 4 o'clock showing of "Jumanji."

Typical afternoon for a couple of kids.
How Under Armour rebuilt U.S. Speed Skating’s training program for the 2018 Winter Olympics


I TALKED TO Under Armour for nearly two hours for this story. Not once did I hear more than two words about the speed skating “skin suits” the U.S. speed skating team will wear next month at the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang, South Korea.

Yes, the Under Armour that makes its money by selling clothing didn’t talk to me about the clothing.

And, yes, Under Armour is supplying the U.S. suits again, just as in the 2014 Sochi Olympics—where, rather famously, the athletes raced in unfamiliar suits, and some heat came back to Under Armour.

But after multiple conversations with Under Armour and with Team USA, it’s clear that the Baltimore-based giant went far beyond supplying clothing for the 2018 Olympic Games. Under Armour has also devoted 56 employees—and thousands of hours in research, development, training, nutrition advice, sleep, meditation, and movement science—to guarantee this year’s American speed skating squad is as prepared as humanly possible. (Also read our primer on the U.S. speed skating team’s interval workout and "pre-hab" workout routine.)

For one thing, Under Armour signed up for an eight-year commitment to the team. That affords the company a unique opportunity to coach and study elite athletes for its own research, which in turn improves more mainstream jocks’ long-term sports science knowledge that, we presume, Under Armour will be able to monetize in the future.

Another reason: patriotism. Without well-trained athletes ready to tackle the grueling 14 speed skating events ranging from 500 to 10,000 meters, fancy Under Armour clothing bearing the stars and stripes won’t win medals.

As the company found, there was more behind the speed skating team’s disappointing turnout in Sochi than uncomfortable suits. And because Under Armour was prepared to re-invest in the suits, the company was prepared to invest in every other aspect of the team’s preparation.

Take, for instance, the simple matter of sleep.

SLEEP
At Sochi, a lot of the premier events were at night. (That will also be the case at PyeongChang.) But leading up to Sochi, the team didn’t train their bodies and adjust their clocks to that biological schedule. That was a formula for failure, says Shane Domer, the sports science director for U.S. Speed Skating.

“When you compete really late at night, and that’s totally foreign to your body, your diet, and your sleep schedule, it doesn’t work whether you’re a pro or an amateur athlete,” he says. This year, the team is already eating breakfast at a leisurely 11 a.m., lunch around 4 or 5 p.m., working out from about 7–10 p.m., and not getting to bed until about 1 a.m.—because that’s how they’ll compete at the games.
“At Sochi we lived and learned,” says Joey Mantia, a world champion long-track speed skater. Mantia admits that the new PyeongChang schedule was an adjustment, but then again: “That’s why we’re doing it, so it will become normal.” The team will even bring blackout blinds, humidifiers, and other special gear to South Korea to be sure they can get the rest they need for proper recovery.

RECOVERY
Speaking of which, another initiative has been to focus on injury prevention and muscle imbalances—which, again, got little attention leading toward Sochi.

“The typical way you approach training pros is to crush the body at certain times, then let them recover,” says Paul Winsper, Under Armour’s vice president of athlete performance. But failing to analyze how athletes respond to workloads is the best way to get them injured, says Winsper, who's worked with stars like David Beckham and Premier League soccer squads.

Instead, working with Domer, the speed skating team has focused on heart rate variability (a key metric of cardiovascular recovery) and a tool called Omegawave, which measures the central nervous system’s response to stress. By sending a few electrical impulses through the body, Omegawave quantifies rest, stress, mood, and response to nutrition, as well as muscular and mental preparedness. Armed with this information, Winsper explains, coaches don’t just say, “Do what you did last time,” blindly believing the skaters will respond positively. Now, they know what to expect.

To that, Domer has added yet another system: fusionetics, which measures functional movement.

“Don’t forget: Speed skaters are like Nascar stock cars—they only go around the track in one direction,” says Domer. Consequently, their bodies become imbalanced. That leads to stress across their backs—it doesn’t help that they have to skate bent-over to cheat wind resistance—as well as tight hips and IT bands. “Put them in the gym like that doing overhead squats, and if they also have poor ankle flexion, you’re setting them up for injury,” says Winsper. By testing the skaters’ responses to recent workouts, and monitoring for any loss of mobility, the coaches have managed to help injured skaters recover and get back on the ice 60% faster.

That’s also why the team spends so much time on functional movement, rather than weight work, Winsper says. Think about it: The skaters’ on-ice training sessions might last upwards of two hours. They hardly need more quad work. But these athletes, like a lot of us, do need constant work on their cores. That’s why Under Armour includes a regular cycle of suspension-trainer work focused on cycling joints through high-stress movements, neglected muscle groups (like hips, lats, and traps), and on the entire thoracic spine. And when they do use weights, “we’re teaching functional sequences, like the Turkish getup,” Winsper says.

Skaters are movement athletes. “Rather than put weights in their hands and have them do a squat,” Winsper says, they need to move around more. And, he argues, the same goes for any athlete who doesn’t want to only be good at lifting weights. Another focus of the overhaul: diet. “It can’t just be calories,” says Domer. Mantia adds: “If you’re eating poorly, you can really feel it.”

At past competitions, nutrition options were often limited to fast food. To figure out how his body responded best, Mantia used the MyFitnessPal app to track all of his food—for an entire year. And he weighed it all, too.

“I did the full test,” he said. “I did no dairy. I did caveman. Eventually what I learned was that the quality of food matters most, and the timing is huge. You need to replenish your glycogen stores right
after a workout. It makes a huge difference in soreness.” Plus, if the team members can’t control their diets, they might wind up gaining weight. “Add just 2lbs, and around these corners your legs are going to feel it,” Domer adds. Luckily, in South Korea, the team will have its own dining hall.

They’ll also have their own tai chi coach. Why tai chi? “Because we wanted them to try movements where they were a little bit uncomfortable,” Domer explains. “Then we worked on techniques to get their minds back to a relaxed state.” These events come down to hundredths of a second. “We wanted to leave no stone unturned, so if our athletes can find ways to deal with discomfort, they can relax. And if they relax, they conserve energy.”

Skating, Mantia says, “is really about being smooth”—like trying to line up 30 golf balls and to hit every one the same, with the same form, over and over. “To do that, the tai chi helps. I’m trying for 98%. Try for 100%, and you’re grunting, you’re not smooth. So I need calm and consistency to do everything just right.”

That’s a good analogy for Under Armour’s effort with U.S. Speed Skating: doing absolutely everything right. Now, with all of that work and preparation, the hope is it will finally pay off on the ice.
UNDER ARMOUR'S OLYMPIC SPEED SKATING SUIT LOOKS TO DEFEAT PHYSICS

https://www.wired.com/story/under-armour-olympic-speed-skating-suit/

THE SPEED SKATING suit has always been the technical marvel of the Winter Olympics. With high-tech fabrics and unusual construction, it's designed to eke out every bit of athletic optimization. In a sport where a thousandth of a second can determine who gets a medal and who doesn't, athletes rely on technology to give them an edge. "We're trying to get the body to be more aerodynamic than it is in its natural state," says Clay Dean, chief innovation officer at Under Armour, the company behind the suit the US speed skating team will wear in PyeongChang this February.

Speed skaters wage a battle with physics every time they race. As their muscular bodies cut through the air at more than 30 mph, they leave a trail of drag in their wake. The key to winning (against physics and humans alike) is to reduce the amount of air resistance a body produces. Part of it is stance—to minimize their body's effect, skaters fold themselves over, keeping their backs flat like a table top—and part of it is suit.

"All we can do is prove through science, through construction, and through material that we've given them the best possible tools to do their job." — Clay Dean, chief innovation officer at Under Armour

Under Armour’s new suit is an overhaul to the Mach 39, the controversial uniform that many blamed for the US team's poor performance in Sochi. In 2014, not a single US speed skater medaled, despite the high prospects going into the Olympics. Under Armour was a natural scapegoat.

In the lead up to the game, the company heralded the Mach 39 as the fastest suit ever designed. The bodysuits were made from a dimpled polyurethane material designed to divert air drag; designers placed a large, latticed vent in the back of the suit to let the athletes bodies breathe. Athletes claimed that the vent allowed too much air to enter the suit, creating a vacuum behind them that slowed their speed. Under Armour and US Speedskating say the technology wasn't to blame, citing an internal report conducted after the Sochi Olympics.1

This year's suit has no vent. Instead, it's stitched together from three fabrics like a couture gown. One of those fabrics, a white nylon spandex mix called H1, runs down the suit’s arms and legs in patches. The fabric's jacquard weave creates an almost imperceptible roughness in the surface. "I would describe it as a very fine grit sandpaper," says Chris Yu, director of integrated technologies at Specialized, the company responsible for the hundreds of hours of wind tunnel testing the suit underwent.

The texture creates pockets in the surface that make the suit more breathable. It also makes the suit more aerodynamic. Yu explains that anything punching a hole in the air will leave a wake or vacuum behind it. Speed skaters need to make that hole as small as possible. Cylindrical objects like arms and legs are particularly troublesome since wind tends to wrap around them, creating vacuum that can slow skaters’ speed. Anywhere you see the H1 fabric is a trouble spot for wind resistance. Under Armour and Specialized claim the small dimples on the surface of the suit disrupt the airflow ever so slightly, causing the air to re-energize and reattach to the limbs so the vacuum is reduced. "Call it the golf ball dimple effect, if you will," Yu says.

Golf balls have dimples across the entirety of their surface because there's no way to account for how the ball will fly through the air. Skaters, on the other hand, move in controlled and predictable ways, making only left turns as they sprint around the track. This predictability allowed the designers to position the H1 material in precise locations on the suit. "You can't add roughness willy nilly," Yu says. "If you add too much you'll introduce more drag; add too little and you're not re-energizing the air quite enough."
The rest of the suit is made from a stretchy polyurethane fabric that's designed to lay flush against the skaters skin, even when they're folded over. Dean says Under Armour decided to sew the suit with an asymmetrical seam that runs from the lower left leg to the right shoulder, which reduces bunching and allows the skaters more freedom of movement during their left turns. It's a small but significant detail that the design team decided to incorporate after analyzing the particular movements skaters make on the ice—the low stance, swinging arms, and right leg that constantly crosses over the left. They then spent more than two years testing the aerodynamics of the suit inside Specialized's wind tunnel, ensuring that the suit met performance standards in every position skaters adopt during a race.

In the lead-up to Sochi, Under Armour kept the Mach 39 so tightly under wraps that the athletes didn't get to test the new design in competition. This time, the athletes have been wearing the suits in practice and competition since last winter, while seamstress nip and tuck the material to tailor-fit it to each skater. It's a long-term design process, but Dean says it's worth it to make a suit he eagerly claims is faster, better, and more advanced than what they made for Sochi. "We believe they do give us an advantage," he says. "It's a faster skating suit than what we had before."

It's an enthusiasm that Dean tempers when he recalls the backlash from the 2014 Olympics. If Under Armour has learned anything in the last few years, it's that a bit of managing expectations can go a long way. And that a suit, even the fastest in the world, is only a small piece of why athletes find themselves on the podium. "There's no guarantees in competition," Dean adds. "All we can do is prove through science, through construction, and through material that we've given them the best possible tools to do their job."