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Chen cherishes experience gained in worlds debut

U.S. champion to use fourth-place finish as motivation moving forward

Posted 4/1/17 by Jean-Christophe Berlot, special to icenetwork



Karen Chen's fourth-place finish at the 2017 World Figure Skating Championships in Helsinki showcased how talented the rising 17-year-old and reigning U.S. champion truly is. -Getty Images

Karen Chen saved the day for Team USA during Friday's free skate, as her brilliant fourth-place finish -- combined with Ashley Wagner's seventh place standing -- opened three spots for the U.S. ladies at the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang.

Still full of excitement following her incredibly successful world's debut, Chen graciously took the time to answer icenetwork's questions regarding the experience she gained in Helsinki.

icenetwork: Karen, you were instrumental -- along with Ashley Wagner -- in keeping those three spots for Team USA. How do you feel about helping your country accomplish this feat in just your first world's appearance?

Karen Chen: It feels amazing! I'm very proud of myself. I definitely felt the pressure and the nerves during the warm-up. I knew that I needed to skate really well, not just for the U.S., but for myself as well. I really wanted to skate well for me, and to prove that I was able to do it in spite of the pressure. Once I was out there, I blocked out all thoughts, and the pressure faded away. Then I was able to skate my program and go from one element to the next.

Icenetwork: How does all of this feel just one day later?

Chen: It is surreal to know I made it this far in my career. Even though I didn't skate my best programs, nor the best I can skate, I gave everything I could.

Icenetwork: What did you learn during these world championships?

It was amazing to just be here. I have so many good memories from this week, and I learned so much. I had some good practice sessions, and I had other practices that didn't turn out the way I would have liked. But, it was such a good experience to know that even though all practices are not perfect, they won't affect what I'll do in the actual competition. I was still able to put out two good programs. The audience was also great, so that certainly helped.

Icenetwork: Did you celebrate last night?

Chen: No, not really. I was excited, and we texted back and forth with my family at home, but we will celebrate once I get back.

Icenetwork: The quality of your edges was visible, especially throughout your short program. Do you work a lot on that aspect of your craft?

Chen: Edges are something I work on a lot every day. The second mark is so important in skating. It would not be possible to work on jumps all day long, (which would result in) potential injuries.

In the short program, the music is so elegant and light. I feel like I'm walking on a pond and I'm a bird. So, the light edges come with acting like a bird.

Icenetwork: What about your components? You managed to get eight-plus components for your first trip to worlds, which is quite a feat.

Chen: I guess components are something I do feel. I must add that I am very much into my music. I choose my music, I love my music and I want to skate to it. So, I suppose my love of skating, combined with my love of music, shows in my programs. That should be one of the factors for my high second mark.

Icenetwork: You mentioned that you choose and pace the music yourself while creating part of your choreography. Is this something you usually do?

Chen: Last season was rough for me, with the problems I had with my boots. Working on the music and choreography made me rediscover my love for the sport. Discovering this music and choreographing the piece made me realize how much I loved skating. Even though I was experiencing hard times, those moments I dreamt of could become true.

This year is the first time I really played with my choreography myself. As for the music, before this season, I used to give my opinion on my team's choices. But, this season I said that I wanted those two pieces.

Icenetwork: How did you pick your music?

Chen: When you hear a piece of music, feel like dancing to it and feel emotion, then it may be a good choice. When I found each one of the pieces, I could imagine myself skating to it, and I really wanted it to happen.

Icenetwork: You have two very different programs. Did this make the task of picking two musical selections more difficult?

Chen: One of my main goals this season was to skate two programs with a different personality. The short is very elegant and calm. The character of the free, in contrast, is strong and fierce. In a way, skating is a very powerful sport. I wanted to bring that out of myself.

Icenetwork: Are you already looking at two new pieces for next year?

Chen: I'm into music all the time! I've not found anything so far, as I was so focused on preparing for these championships. But, I'll find something I'll be willing to skate to.

Icenetwork: Are you into other forms of art when not fixated on skating?

Chen: I used to do art-related things like drawing and painting, but not as frequently as I would have liked, given the time I have. I am more into the abstract. I don't paint exactly what I see, but a variety of colors to represent my feelings. For instance, I'll be in the blues when I'm down.

Icenetwork: How do you make your rich artistic background visible to the audience while on the ice?

Chen: I think it's all just a feeling. The goal is to have your mind and body free on the ice, find what gives you the most confidence, and don't be afraid.

Many things can frighten you, like "what if I don't do well enough?" or similar things that take you down.

Now I know that if I'm not up to standard, I can have someone take me there. But, it won't come by itself. I need to open myself up, otherwise I won't get the support I need.

Icenetwork: Do you really not have much time in your life for anything other than skating?

Chen: I have no time for anything else besides skating, and I am a senior in high school. I have many loads between the two. I have no time for other things.

Icenetwork: Do you know what you'll do after you graduate high school?

Chen: We'll see. I might get into the medical field. I had to deal with many injuries in the past, and I really appreciated the work they did.

I think I'll wait one year, to give all I have for the Olympics and see what it leads me to. After next year, I'll concentrate more on my studies.

Icenetwork: What do you think you'll cherish most from your first experience at the world championships?

Chen: Skating here was amazing, especially after the short program, as I was able to skate in the last group. Skating along with so many great skaters was incredible, both in the practice sessions and in the warm-up. I was in awe most of the time.

This inspired me heading into my long program -- and should definitely inspire me beyond.



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