

Alysa Liu is the Future of Figure Skating

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Though [Alysa Liu](#) is headed to her first Olympic Winter Games, the world of figure skating has had its eye on the record breaker for years — and she’s only 16 years old. The Team Toyota athlete has been a figure skating force since she was 13, and now she’s finally heading to the big stage.

“It’s really crazy because all the training I’ve done is to go to the Olympics, right?” Liu says. “But now, it’s so soon. I’ve basically spent the last 11 years training to go to the Olympics, so it feels weird to me that the experience is almost here.”

The oldest of five siblings, Liu first tried figure skating at five years old when her father took her and her younger sister to the Oakland Ice Center in Oakland, California. Liu loved falling and sliding around on the ice, so her father enrolled her in group lessons. Those group skates soon became private lessons, allowing the young skater to start taking the sport seriously at just 10 years old.



In 2019, when Liu was 13 years old, she won her first senior singles nationals, becoming the youngest female to win the U.S. Championships. She won the title again in 2020. Liu’s family and friends have been there for her every step of the way, helping the teenager navigate the spotlight, growth spurts — both physical and emotional — and the ups and downs of the competitive sport.

“My family is a really big support system for me,” she says. “My siblings and my dad used to watch all of my competitions. It’s a little different now with COVID restrictions, but they’ve always been there for me.”

A Competition Season on Ice

Like so many other sports, the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the world of competitive figure skating. With competitions canceled and rinks closed, Liu says it was almost like a big holiday for the athletes.

“Before quarantine, I never really got any breaks, so it was my longest time off the ice,” she says. “I didn’t skate for a long time, and while part of it was relaxing and I enjoyed the time off, it was weird.”



While Liu enjoyed the rest, getting back into the sport was surprisingly challenging. Even though she loves skating, she didn't immediately want to get back on the rink.

"It was weird to go back after not training for so long," she says. "It was hard to get started, and I was injured, which didn't help. I was pretty unmotivated until competition started again."

Competitive figure skating is divided into testing levels, so there is a natural progression for growing skaters to move up through the divisions. Liu finds this process motivating, with regular competitions to look forward to and the ability to see her progress. Though contests are an easy way to follow her successes, Liu has learned over the years to not let her scores impact her daily routine.

"I try to not let the bad days get to me anymore," she says. "When I was younger, I would get upset every time I had a bad skate — not anymore. I don't feel upset when I have a bad day, so I don't need to spend time trying to bounce back."

Skating into a New Chapter

With Northern California still remaining her home, Liu now travels back and forth to Colorado Springs, Colorado for coaching and training. When she's in Colorado, Liu is on the ice just under four hours a day, plus a workout or physical therapy session.

"It's been really fun working with my coaching team so far," she says. "And a few of my friends train in Colorado, so it's been great being able to do workouts with them. Some of my competitors are my closest friends. Despite what people might think, it's definitely a team sport."

Liu says she doesn't mind the travel because getting to go home for a week lets her take a break from the skating world and her busy schedule. She likes having California as her home base, where her father is the only one driving the family's Toyota Highlander Hybrid — for now.

“I’m really excited to actually learn how to drive it,” she says. “Though I’ve been reminded that once I learn how to drive, I won’t get to sleep in the passenger seat anymore.”

Liu, who has been on Team Toyota for a little over a year now, is looking forward to getting her driver’s license and being able to go places by herself, especially the beach. Heading into the Olympic Winter Games, the figure skater is grateful to add the other Team Toyota athletes to her support system.

“It’s still kind of crazy to me that a company this big is supporting me,” Liu says. “I’ve gotten to do a lot of cool things, and everyone on Team Toyota is great and encouraging. I’ve really enjoyed it so far.”