

The Return of Chloe Kim

February 03, 2022

Image not found or type unknown



At the PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games, 17-year-old [Chloe Kim](#) became the youngest woman to ever win gold at the Olympic Winter Games in halfpipe. The first-place finish helped launch the young Team Toyota athlete to the forefront of women's snowboarding — an experience that has been equal parts exciting and

overwhelming.

“It was very unexpected for me,” Kim says. “I didn’t realize what would come with an Olympic medal — I still can’t believe it. I’m just very grateful, and I realize how blessed I am to be able to do this again.”

When the excitement of the gold-medal win settled down, Kim decided to take a break from snowboarding. She enrolled at Princeton University and spent time rehabilitating an ankle injury, which meant that Kim was off the snow for a total of 22 months. Returning to the halfpipe in 2021, the Olympian felt surprisingly stressed about her upcoming competitions.

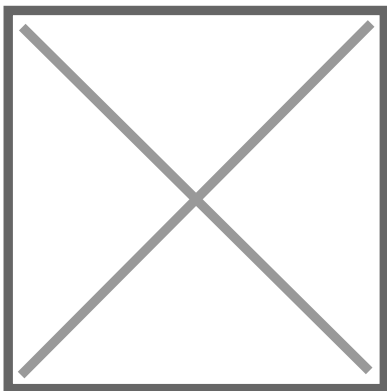
Though Kim says returning after downtime between seasons always makes her anxious, this time was worse. Even her coach, Rick Bower, who’s worked with her since she was 14 years old, said he’d never seen her so nervous. But after her first run, the nerves were gone. And Kim’s been on a winning streak ever since, taking first in all six of her starts during the 2021-22 season. Now, Kim hopes to ride that winning streak right through to the Olympic Winter Games.

“Coming back to snowboarding after taking so many months off, I didn’t expect too much,” she says. “So, doing well my first season back was an incredible feeling. Not because I was winning, but because I was able to overcome those feelings of uncertainty and self-doubt.”

An Early Start

Kim grew up outside of Los Angeles, and learned to snowboard at Mountain High Resort, which was about an hour and a half away. The athlete spent her early years riding with her father, who would accompany her to training camps and competitions before she joined the U.S. Snowboarding Team in 2015.

Even though she was too young to compete at Sochi 2014, Kim won her first X Games medal (silver) in SuperPipe at just 13 years old. The young snowboarder ultimately became the only X Games athlete ever to win three gold medals before the age of 16, followed by her first Olympic gold at 17. As a Korean American, her win there felt even more significant.



“My experience was a little unique,” she says. “My parents immigrated from Korea and my first Olympics was in Korea, and that’s where I got my first gold. I don’t think anyone’s had that kind of story — where everything just lined up perfectly. It was such a journey.”

As much as Kim enjoyed her time at the Olympics, she says what came after the Games was really the fun part. The Olympian, who went viral for a tweet about being “hangry” right before her gold medal run, came home to a

freezer full of ice cream and other snacks from her favorite brands; she rapped with G-Eazy at an ESPYs after-party, and made an appearance in a Maroon 5 music video.

“I’ve been joking that I’m excited to get the Games over with because of how much I love the aftermath of the Olympics,” she says. “It was so much fun and some of the best memories I’ve ever had.”

Mentally Preparing for Beijing

Heading into her second Olympics at just 21 years old, Kim has grown a lot. However, she’s still learning how to handle the ups and downs of being an elite athlete on a global level. That’s why Kim is prioritizing her mental health this time.

“At PyeongChang, I felt like I had taken on this image of being happy, with a big smile on my face and this bubbly personality,” she says. “I never wanted anyone to think I was unhappy or stressed. But that meant I never worked on the things I needed to work on mentally.”

During the pandemic, Kim said she has started working on shifting her mindset to something more positive — a process that has helped her feel ready to return to the Olympic Village. To her, snowboarding is more than just winning medals.

“I’m in a much better place now, and I feel very relaxed and stress free,” Kim says. “I understand what the end goal is. I understand that there are a lot of other things that are going to happen in my life after snowboarding.”

“I snowboard because it makes me happy. That’s why I started it. That’s why I decided to do it professionally. Because it was the one thing that I was so happy doing — not because I was winning.”