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Chen hopes to put injury bug behind him in 2016-17

JGP Final champion to change training regimen in order to avoid setbacks

Posted 8/26/16 by Lynn Rutherford, special to icenetwork



Nathan Chen said his main goal for 2016-17 is to make it through the entire season without an injury. - Jay Adeff

For a few hours on Jan. 24, [Nathan Chen](#) could celebrate his bronze medal and record-breaking programs at the 2016 U.S. Figure Skating Championships in Saint Paul, Minnesota, and savor two coveted international assignments.

Later that day, the 16-year-old athlete faced a left hip injury that would take him off the ice for months, with weeks of recuperation to follow.

Now, it seems that painful interlude is mostly in Chen's rearview mirror.

"Everything is about back to normal," Chen said at U.S. Figure Skating's Champs Camp, held in Colorado Springs from Aug. 20-25. "I'm back to full training. I took 5 1/2 months off the ice after nationals, and it

took me another month to get back into the swing of things. I'm feeling good."

Chen, who turned 17 on May 5, lit up Saint Paul with his daring performances, landing two quadruple jumps in his short program and four in his free skate, the first U.S. man to achieve both milestones. Soon after the medal ceremony, he was named to the U.S. roster for both the world championships and the world junior championships. But a jump attempt during the Skating Spectacular exhibition went awry, and Chen was diagnosed with an avulsion injury. He underwent surgery within a week.

After a month of rehabilitation at the U.S. Olympic Training Center (OTC) in Chula Vista, California, the skater went to the Colorado Springs OTC. There, he worked with specialists including Brandon Siakel, the strength and conditioning trainer who also helped Jason Brown and Polina Edmunds rehabilitate from injuries this summer.

After two months, Chen said, his brace was off and he was walking. A month later, he was in the gym rebuilding muscles and strength, especially in his left leg. A few weeks later, he began a slow return to the ice.

"I got a lot of help from USOC, and I'm very thankful," Chen said. "It's a journey getting back to where I was. I have the elements now, but it's putting them all together and getting into a mental state where I'm ready to compete."

Soon after the injury, Rafael Arutunian, who coaches Chen in Southern California, hinted that his young student was apt to overtrain.

"You must learn how to count whenever you do something," Arutunian said. "You must take care of your body."

Siakel and others at the OTC counseled Chen about training to avoid injuries, which is particularly important when practicing so many four-revolution jumps.

"I just wasn't very smart in terms of planning (last) season out," Chen said. "I've learned a lot in my time off at USOC. They've given me a lot of information."

Chen is also hopeful that his chances of injury will diminish as he ages out of adolescence. Avulsion fractures, in which a piece of bone is torn from the rest of the bone, are common in young athletes.

"All of my injuries over the past have been growth injuries, and I'm reaching the end of my growth spurt, so I don't think those will be the major issues any more," Chen said. "The biggest thing to be wary of is to make sure I don't have overuse injuries, and I think I've learned to not push myself too hard at the beginning of the season."

At Champs Camp, Chen showed two new programs, which include the quad toe and quad salchow he competed last season. He has landed other quads in practice but prefers not to discuss them.

"I'd rather just do them (in competition) first and then talk about them," he said.

For his short program, the skater hopes to capitalize on the 10 years of ballet training he received as a youngster growing up in Salt Lake City.

"(Last) season, I didn't get the program component scores I wanted," Chen said. "Something Rafael brought up to me was (working with) Marina Zoueva, so I got to work with her and got my short program done to *Le Corsaire*. I have a pretty strong background in classical ballet, so it's somewhat in my genre."

Zoueva, whose time with Chen included watching videos of Rudolf Nureyev performing *Le Corsaire*, sang the teen's praises.

"It is absolutely amazing how he responds to any advice, immediately and cleanly," Zoueva said. "He is open to everything. You give him a movement and, wow, how beautiful he emphasizes everything. He is a very serious worker."

Chen also showed a free skate choreographed by one of his coaches, Nadia Kanaeva, to Alexander Borodin's "Polovtsian Dances" from *Prince Igor*.

"It's very powerful music, and I wanted something that was powerful and in my style, but different in a way," Chen said. "I've just come back from an injury, so I didn't want something brand new to me that would take a long time to get comfortable with."

Chen is set to compete at Trophée de France and NHK Trophy this fall, and also plans to compete at another international event prior to his Grand Prix competitions. His main competitive goal is to skate his best at the 2017 U.S. Figure Skating Championships and earn a spot on the U.S. world team in hopes of helping Team USA qualify three men for the PyeongChang Olympics.

There's an even bigger overall goal, however.

"I want to last the whole season," he said. "That's my goal: to go through to the Olympic season without any injuries."

Ellington too cool for Hochstein

When coaches Peter Oppegard and Karen Kwan-Oppegard suggested [Grant Hochstein](#) skate his short to Duke Ellington's jazzy version of "Rhapsody in Blue," the skater wasn't too thrilled.

"Peter said, 'You need to move really cool, really be sexy,' and I was like, 'Peter, that's not me. Adam [Rippon] is cool; I'm not cool,'" Hochstein said. "But I have this year and next year (to compete), and it's good for me to experiment now, because I'm not going to go crazy the Olympic season."

Eventually, Hochstein and Oppegard devised a storyline to help ease the skater into hipster status.

"I play a young guy coming to the big city for the first time," he said. "At first, he is overwhelmed trying to take it all in, but as the program goes along, he gets more comfortable. By the time I do my triple lutz, I'm dancing alone at night, and it starts to rain. It really helps me to play a character."

Hochstein plays a darker, more dramatic role in his free skate: the murderous clown in *Pagliacci*. Both programs were choreographed by Peter Oppegard.

The skater plans a quad toe in his short and hopes to have two quad toes in his free skate for his first Grand Prix, Skate Canada. Before that, he has two Challenger Series events: Lombardia Trophy (Sept. 17-20) and Nebelhorn Trophy (Sept. 24-26). His goal is to gain International Skating Union (ISU) ranking points.

"Because my world ranking is fairly low, I skated first (in the short) at Cup of China and second at NHK last season," Hochstein said. "Doing back-to-back events early, I'm hoping to move up the order."



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