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Newly crowned world champ Chen admitted to Yale

Skater expresses desire to maintain coaching relationship with Arutunian

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Less than a week after winning his first world title, Nathan Chen got the news that he had been accepted into Yale University's Class of 2022. -Getty Images

Talk about your happy coincidences and good omens.

Nathan Chen swings through Hartford with *Stars on Ice* on Sunday, April 22, before the tour has four nights off.

Bulldog Days, the three-day information session for newly admitted Yale students, begins April 23 in New Haven -- just 40 miles away from the Connecticut capital.

So Chen will be in the right place at the right time to speak to the right people at Yale about how -- and if -- he can begin his college career with the 2018 fall semester and simultaneously continue as a competitive figure skater.

"Going to Yale next fall is the goal right now," Chen said via telephone Tuesday morning from Fort Myers, Florida, where he is rehearsing for the *Stars on Ice* opening show Friday night. "I am going to Bulldog Days, where I will talk about everything and try to figure things out."

Chen must tell Yale by May 1 if he intends to matriculate in the fall.

Among the biggest questions for the new world champion will be whether he can continue to work with Rafael Arutunian, his coach since age 11. Arutunian is based in suburban Los Angeles.

Chen said he has yet to talk with Arutunian and wants to do that face to face. But the skater said he wants to try a long-distance coaching relationship.

"That's the idea, but I still have to talk to Raf about it," Chen said. "Ultimately, the only thing (certain) right now is that I have been admitted to Yale, and I still want to continue skating."

Arutunian said Tuesday by phone he was willing to give the long-distance idea a chance, even though he would prefer to have Chen stay in California.

"I think it will be hard for him," Arutunian said. "I will help as much as I can. He is my baby. I will be at his side, whatever happens."

In the past 10 years, other top U.S. skaters -- including Emily Hughes and Christina Gao (Harvard), and Rachael Flatt (Stanford) -- kept competing while attending high-powered universities, meeting with middling success on the ice. Hughes and Flatt both entered college after skating in an Olympics, but neither had anything close to Chen's resume in the sport, which includes the 2018 world title, the last two U.S. titles and a fifth-place finish at the Olympics.

Chen said he has spoken with Paul Wylie about pulling double duty. Wylie entered Harvard in 1986, graduated in 1991 and competed in the 1988 and 1992 Olympics, finishing 10th in the former and winning a silver in the latter. During his undergraduate years, Wylie took summer school classes three times and took two semesters off.

"It was a completely different time in the sport, however," Wylie wrote via text. "We did not have the Grand Prix Series leading to the Grand Prix Final, and there was no Four Continents. That being said, I tried to see myself like any of the athletes competing there (at Harvard), or like (Harvard) musicians performing on the road.

"It was hard, especially when I was gone for long periods for competition. One time, I went to the World University Games, and they lasted 11 days. When I got back, my math class had moved way past me. I

tried to stay up with everyone, but it was easier in the humanities, which was one of the reasons I chose government as a major."

Chen, 18, has mentioned pre-med, which is not a defined undergraduate major at Yale. The Yale School of Medicine requires prospective applicants to have completed a total of eight term (semester) courses in biology/zoology, chemistry and physics. Yale requires 36 term (semester) courses for an undergraduate degree.

"I need to talk with advisors and people at Yale about what my academic trajectory will look like," Chen said. "Potentially, I can do some general requirements online, then figure out the rest as I go along."

Thomas Conroy, director of Yale's Office of Public Affairs and Communications, did not address directly an emailed question about whether Yale online courses (or others) could count toward a Yale student's undergraduate degree. Conroy's reply noted only that Yale undergraduates are required to live on campus their first two years. A follow-up email seeking further clarification was not answered.

If college and competition proved too difficult to juggle, would Chen, who turns 19 in May, give up skating?

"I don't think so," he said. "I'm just barely (two seasons) at the senior level, and I feel like I have a lot more to do in the sport. I don't think it's my time to retire yet."

Should he decide to enter the school in August, there are also some happy scheduling coincidences between the 2018-19 Yale academic calendar and the competitive schedule next season.

Skate America, in Everett, Washington, takes place during the Yale October recess. The French Grand Prix event in Grenoble falls during the Thanksgiving recess. The Grand Prix Final, in Vancouver, begins the day before Yale's pre-finals reading period starts. The 2019 World Championships, in Japan, are during Yale's spring break.

"My decisions will be largely based on conversations between me and Yale and me and U.S. Figure Skating, to just figure out what the best approach is," Chen said.

He has yet to talk with U.S. Figure Skating about all the ramifications of his becoming a full-time college student.

"This just really happened, so the next step is for Nathan and his team to speak with USFS about the details," U.S. Figure Skating spokesman Michael Terry said.

The U.S. Olympic Committee said it would continue to give the support it provides to its top athletes as they train for the subsequent Olympics.

"Our sport performance team works with each federation, in this case U.S. Figure Skating, to invest individualized resources where we think they will have the most impact," USOC spokesman Patrick Sandusky wrote via email. "As we work toward Beijing 2022, we'll make sure that our elite athletes have the resources they need to be successful."

Chen found out about his Yale acceptance last Thursday in Japan, where he did four *Stars on Ice Japan* shows in Osaka. He was among just 2,239 students to whom Yale offered admission out a record pool of 35,306 applicants -- a 6.31 percent acceptance rate.

It was yet another milestone in a whirlwind two months for Chen, starting with his Olympic debut in South Korea, where he won a team bronze medal, and climaxing with the world gold in Milan two weeks ago.

His free skate in PyeongChang, which included five clean quads in six attempts (both Olympic firsts), followed miserable performances in the team and individual short programs. He had the same quad success rate in the free skate at worlds, and his short program there had just one relatively minor mistake.

"It was great to be able to end the season that way, especially after not the greatest Olympic experience," Chen said. "(But) being able to perform at the Olympics that way released all the pressure I had on myself going to worlds.

"During training and prep leading up to worlds, I was just able to focus on enjoying skating, not worrying so much about all the talk around me. It was like, 'Just do what you have to do, and you know you are good at it, and perform that at worlds.' I'm glad was able to do that."

After winning the short program in Milan, Chen was the last skater to perform in the free skate. Before taking the ice, he was well aware that everyone else in the final group had skated so poorly because he was assiduously following Jackie Wong's up-to-the-second Twitter play-by-play.

"I like to know what is going on before I skate," he said. "I was shocked when everyone kept dropping placements."

Others might have played it safe at that point by doing fewer quads. Chen took just the opposite approach.

"I'm always trying to improve myself, to challenge myself," he said. "My goal throughout the season was trying to improve, competition to competition.

"Doing what I did at the Olympics (in the free skate) set a benchmark. I wanted to improve on that."

Chen scored 4.38 more points in his worlds free skate than he did at the Olympics. He took the world title by 47.63 points -- by far the largest winning margin in history.

"I wasn't expecting a world championship gold medal this early in my career," he said. "Having that is great."

For the next couple of weeks, Chen wants to forget about competition and simply enjoy being on the 22-city *Stars on Ice* tour. Whether he could take time off and return, how the rules changes in the sport may affect him -- all those and more immediate questions can wait for answers.

"I have no idea what will happen in the next month, let alone the next four years," he said.



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