

→ ALYSA LIU WAS EVERYWHERE IN 2026, INCLUDING THE VANITY FAIR OSCAR PARTY.



**A**s figure skater Alysa Liu leaped and spun through the final moments of her free skate at the 2026 Winter Olympics in February, the disco pulse of Donna Summer’s “MacArthur Park” filling the arena, it was hard to tell what shone brighter: the lights flashing off Liu’s gold-spangled dress or the joy radiating across her face.

That performance put 20-year-old Liu atop the podium at the Milano Cortina Games—the first such achievement for an American in women’s figure skating in 24 years—and catapulted her to stardom. Soon, Liu was on television screens and magazine covers, at the Met Gala in New York City, in a music video, and presenting an award to Taylor Swift.

But much as she seemed unfazed by the pressure of her sport’s biggest stage, Liu hasn’t let the fame go to

# OAKLAND’S GOLDEN GIRL

Alysa Liu, the breakout sensation of the 2026 Winter Olympics, stays true to the East Bay. **By LeeAnne Jones**

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her head. When asked about her favorite experience, she says none of it compares to the Olympic Games themselves. “I got to be with my teammates and meet so many other amazing athletes,” she says. “Being surrounded by that energy was really special, especially since we shared this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity together.”

Liu has used her newfound attention to shine a light on her hometown of Oakland. Instead of a traditional victory parade, she wanted to party with the people. Thousands showed up at Frank H. Ogawa Plaza in March, some in halo-striped wigs in honor of Liu’s trademark hairstyle, to watch her receive the key to the city and a custom Oakland Roots jersey as she appeared on stage with other local notables, including Sway Calloway, W. Kamau Bell, G-Eazy, and Kehlani.

“I’m proud of where I’m from,” says Liu. “The people I love are from the Bay, and I am who I am because of it. ... We support our people heavy. I’m beyond grateful.”

Not far from the Plaza is the Oakland Ice Center, where a mural now honors both Liu and East Bay skating legend Kristi Yamaguchi. Liu’s father enrolled her in skating classes there when she was 5. In 2019, at age 13, Liu became the youngest U.S. champion in figure skating history. That same year, she graced the cover of *Diablo’s* Best of

the East Bay issue and shared her love of daring jumps—and of slime.

Even as a child prodigy, Liu’s path through the sport would prove anything but straightforward, including the isolation of training through COVID-19, a sixth-place finish at the 2022 Winter Olympics, and a retirement announcement on Instagram at age 16.

For two years, she traveled, spent time with friends, and reveled in the freedom of making her own choices. Then, on a ski trip, the familiar rush of

speed and cold air drew Liu back to the ice—on her own terms. About a year later, with handpicked coaches, choreographers, and costumes, she won the ISU World Figure Skating Championships. Within another year, she was back on Olympic ice in Italy.

So where does she go from here? Oakland, of course.

“As soon as the competition season begins, I’ll resume my training in Oakland,” says Liu. “I can’t wait to get back to it.” ■



→ LIU’S GOLD-WINNING FREE SKATE AT THE 2026 WINTER OLYMPICS.