

MEET

Time to Shine

Fremont ice-skater Karen Chen aims for the Winter Olympics.

BY LEEANNE JONES

● **WHEN FIGURE SKATER** and Fremont native Karen Chen defends her title as U.S. national champion, she'll do so in front of a hometown crowd. At San Jose's SAP Center December 29–January 7, she could also score a spot on the U.S. Olympic team.

"It's really exciting," says the 18-year-old, whose performance at last March's World Championships earned the U.S. ladies the maximum three invites to the 2018 Winter Olympic Games in South Korea. "At the same time, there will be additional pressure because it's my hometown, and I don't want to disappoint."

Chen first donned skates at age four and has never looked back. After sixth grade, she started being homeschooled to accommodate her training, and at 14, she moved with her mother and brother to Southern California to train with coach Tammy Gambill. (Chen's father remained in the East Bay to work, and the family reunites every few weeks.)



Karen Chen strikes a pose at last year's U.S. Figure Skating Championships.



In Her Words

Out November 28, Chen's autobiography, *Finding the Edge: My Life on the Ice*, offers a behind-the-scenes look at her journey, including her recovery from a nearly career-ending ankle injury.

"I may only be 18, but I've experienced some things that are pretty challenging," says Chen. "I hope my story can help inspire people to overcome obstacles and achieve their dreams."

The commitment paid off. Chen has quickly piled up awards, winning the U.S. intermediate title in 2011 and the novice title in 2012. After a devastating ankle fracture in 2013 almost derailed her career, she worked her way back to the top, stunning the figure skating world with a senior national championship victory last January. "That was definitely a confidence boost," says Chen. "It was a huge step in the right direction. I have momentum; I just have to keep it going."

Earning a spot in the Olympics would be a dream come true, but Chen tries not to get ahead of

herself. In San Jose, she'll skate to "El Tango De Roxanne" from *Moulin Rouge*, which she picked because it is "fierce and powerful." She'll also wear her lucky jade necklace and keep in mind advice from another Fremont-raised skater and this year's Threads of Hope Visionary Award winner: Kristi Yamaguchi, who won Olympic gold 25 years ago.

"She told me to 'skate dumb,'" says Chen. "It's all about muscle memory. When you think too much, you can delay your reaction time and body movements. Having [Yamaguchi] as a mentor is pretty amazing."



JAY ADEFF/U.S. FIGURE SKATING