



AMANDA KESSEL



BRIANNA DECKER



ALEX RIGSBY

GOING FOR THE GOLD

U.S. HOCKEY TEAM HAS THREE WISCO GALS

BY EMILY LEAS

WHEN THE USA Women's National Hockey Team takes the ice in Pyeong Chang, South Korea, for the 2018 Winter Olympics, three players from Wisconsin help fill the 23-player roster. Amanda Kessel of Madison and Brianna Decker of Dousman both make their second appearance at the games, and Alex Rigsby of Delafield competes in her first Olympics.

The team recently won the World Championship against Canada, and it won another fight over compensation in a dispute over pay disparities between the men's and women's programs.

The three elite players from Wisconsin chatted with BRAVA about their lives in competitive sports and what it takes to make it to the Olympics, slated Feb. 9–25.

AMANDA KESSEL: "SOMEBODY'S ALWAYS TRYING TO TAKE YOUR SPOT."

What was your journey through hockey like growing up?

I got put into a pair of skates when I was 4 and fell in love with the sport. I went to boarding school at the age of 14 and I loved it. You leave home early, but it was the best thing for my hockey career...I've learned that you have to always be prepared and be in shape because there's always the next camp or tournament coming up. Somebody's always trying to take your spot.

What's your biggest fear when it comes to playing at this level?

I think it's just growing too old for the sport. There are minimal professional leagues right now. They've been getting bigger in the last few years, so hopefully that continues so that I can keep playing.

Have you ever had any major injuries?

I suffered a concussion before the last Olympics and had lasting effects from that for about two years. Those were some terrible years of my life and I'm lucky to have made it through.

On days you don't feel like training, what drives you to get back out on the ice?

Some days are tough, whether you're tired or sore. But it's really about my teammates; knowing that I'm going to be training with them and training for them,

trying to be the best I can to help the team in any way I can. It's so great to go through that with these women.

BRIANNA DECKER: "THE GAME IS VERY PHYSICAL."

What did it take to get to this level?

It was really committing myself every day to not only being a better player, but also to be a better teammate. Whether I was playing soccer, softball or hockey, I just concentrated on making others around me better as well. But there was a lot of sacrifice along the way—not being able to go to birthday parties, or going out with friends on the weekend. All those little sacrifices helped me get to where I am now.

How do you make an impact on younger players today?

I try to run camps in the summer, whether it's with our youth national team programs or other camps around the U.S. It's just awesome. I ran a camp in Nashville, Tennessee, last summer and that was really fun because there aren't a lot of girls in the South interested in the sport, so it was fun to get them excited about it.

What is something that you think most people don't realize about female hockey players or the women's game?

I would have to say how physical our game is. Even though technically there is no hitting allowed, the game is very physical. Also, just how driven we are as human beings. We want the best for each other, but also to have an impact on younger girls, not just in our sport, but in other sports as well.

ALEX RIGSBY: "MY MOM POINTED OUT THAT I COULD DO THAT, TOO, SOMEDAY."

How old were you when you started playing hockey?

I was 5 years old when I learned to skate at Naga-Waukeice arena, just a couple minutes from my house [in Delafield], and then played at the Pettit National Ice Center through my older years. I played boys hockey the whole way through up until college when I went to UW-Madison and played on the women's team.

Was that a hard transition? Playing with mostly boys and then moving to an all-girls team?

It was just different. I was fortunate to play on teams where I had earned the respect of my teammates and coaches. I viewed them as my brothers. When I got to college, the women on the team were unbelievable and to this day are still my best friends. But it's definitely different hockey-wise. I was going from battling with 6'2" guys in front of me to a 5'7" female. I could actually see over people!

What did it take for you to get to this level of hockey?

The first thing that comes to mind are sacrifices, but it was all worth it in the end. When I was 6, [the USA Women's Hockey team] had just won gold in the first year [1998] for women's hockey at the Olympics. My mom pointed out that I could do that, too, someday. I didn't know the magnitude at that age, but I always knew I was going to play in the Olympics. So as I got older, I knew I wanted to play in college, then I knew I wanted to play on the National team, and eventually competing at the Olympics became a reality. So, just having those goals and dreams, and making those sacrifices, doing whatever it took to get to that next level.

What is your training regimen right now for the Olympics?

With Olympic residency [in Tampa, Florida], we started the beginning of the year with exhibition games against boy junior teams around here and some college club teams. A normal day is practice from 9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m., then we have an off-ice session, so either skills or strength and conditioning. We have some meetings, then call it a day. We're also in the middle of our The Time is Now tour, so we're playing exhibition games against Canada throughout December. Then in January, we'll be wrapping up and getting prepared to head to the Olympics.

What's the excitement level for your first Olympics?

I'm so excited. It's important to enjoy the journey and the process, not looking too far ahead. But we're so excited to get there. And I'm so excited to be part of the Team USA culture, and getting to see these amazing athletes compete at their sport. 🌟



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