

## SCORECARD

→ **What's in a name?** Maybe wishful thinking. Perhaps a foreshadowing. Sometimes a marketer's dream.

America's new Olympic skating princess isn't named Gracie Fourth Place. When she hits the ice in Sochi, even Gracie Gold knows the headline potential. "Hmm, Golden Girl. Good as Gold. Gold Rush. Gracie Gets Gold—those are some of my favorites," she said last month after winning the U.S. championships in Boston. "I can see it."

To be fair, the 18-year-old's peak may be four years away, and Gold will face stiff competition in Sochi, including returning Olympic champion Kim Yu-na of South Korea, but a podium spot isn't out of reach. Gold brings style, flair and—here comes the name again—grace to the ice. That she can already see winning headlines in her future is a testament to the moxie that got her here in the first place.

Go back a year, to the 2013 nationals in Omaha, where Gold was in ninth place after flubbing her short program but rallied to finish second after a superb free skate. She had never been on a national podium as a senior skater, but at the press conference afterward she sat with third-place finisher Agnes Zawadzki and victor Ashley Wagner and told reporters, "I want to congratulate these two women because they are amazing and they push me. They skated great short programs and really

A PERIODIC LOOK AT SOME OF  
THE MOST INTRIGUING RISING STARS

# BIG BOARD

FIGURE SKATING

+

## Say Hello, Gracie

*The new U.S. champion has the look,  
and even the sound, of a winner*

BY BRIAN CAZENEUVE



good long programs and they deserve to be here with me." That was a hasty comment from an excited teen catching her first glimmer of the spotlight, but the implication was on the table: It was Gracie's world now.

EVEN AS A young child, Gold loved performing. When she spotted a passing parent from the living room, she would throw her arms back and shout, "Watch me! Watch me!" before unleashing a series of cartwheels. She was seven when she went to a friend's ice skating party in Springfield, Mo., and came home wanting more. Her parents, Denise and Carl, started her in skating lessons within days.

Gracie's fraternal twin, Carly, took up the sport four months later. Carly has generally been a step behind her sister on the ice; she missed reaching this year's nationals by one place at a sectional qualifier. But the two were equally dogged in their constant household competitions. Who could run up the stairs faster? Throw a ball farther? Braid her hair and brush her teeth quicker? "I had to bake better cookies than she did," Gracie says. "That's just how I was."

To facilitate their daughters' skating, Denise and Carl moved the family multiple times. The twins have lived or trained in half a dozen cities, from Boston, where they were born, to El Segundo, Calif., where they live now. At one point

Denise was driving the girls five hours each way to train in Kansas City, Mo., before the Golds moved from one Springfield (Mo.) to another Springfield (Ill.) to switch coaches. The girls have taken online classes exclusively since their sophomore year of high school. "It gives me the flexibility to jump from skating to homework based on my schedule," says Gracie, who'll graduate in June.

Denise was at first leery of her daughter's single-mindedness about skating. "Gracie is very hardwired," her mother says. "Once the levels became more demanding, her friends would drop out and I'd remind her that this was going to end someday. She would just say, 'What? What do you mean?'"

In 2010, Gracie took fourth in the national novice division, and senior-level success was within reach. But she had a nearly five-inch growth spurt over the next year (she's now 5' 6") and found her jumps going off-kilter. She struggled to learn new skills. "When improvements didn't come," she says, "I would just get mad at myself and make things worse."

Carly had seen it before. "Even with essays and art projects, Gracie would work on them exactly until she felt good about them, even if I couldn't see anything wrong," she says.

Carly thinks her sister's high expectations help explain her short-program blunders a year ago in



***"Judges were looking for her to grow up, to become a young lady [and] a serious contender who deserves to be rewarded for maximizing her abilities," says Carroll, Gold's new coach.***

Omaha. "It was all nerves, the expectation of being out there," Carly says. "In the long program she had a nothing-to-lose mentality. She was more relaxed."

In September, looking to improve further, Gold left coach Alex Ouriashev, a two-time Ukrainian men's champ, and moved with her mom and sister from Illinois to El Segundo to train with Frank Carroll, the mentor who guided Evan Lysacek to a gold medal in Vancouver and Michelle Kwan to four world titles.

With little time to prepare Gold for U.S. nationals, the 75-year-old Carroll went to work on her skating and her outlook. Even though the season had already started, Carroll took the short program she had worked on for several months and tossed it into the trash. As he put it, Gold's jazzy Gershwin tune, "Three Preludes," sounded like "fighting cats." Hoping to give Gold something

more sophisticated, he worked with her on a short program set to a piano concerto by Edvard Grieg.

"It was like taking two grades in one year at school—a lot to learn," Carroll says. "Judges were looking for her to grow up, to become a young lady [and] a serious contender who deserves to be rewarded for maximizing her abilities." Carroll has seen many emerging skaters skate *through* rather than *to* their music, causing them to lose connection with the rhythm and pace as they wait for the next jump. During a layback spin, Carroll would remind Gold, "Don't be afraid to be elegant." He created a free skate program around Tchaikovsky's "Sleeping Beauty" that could be a hit with the crowd, especially a Russian crowd.

Carroll also worked on Gold's head. "She needed to understand how to mess up," he says. "She could be too demanding on herself when she missed a jump. She'd have a triple flip in front of her and she'd be thinking about the Lutz combination she missed a minute ago. We emphasized what could be better next, not what just went wrong."

The test of calm came during the long program in Boston last month, when she scraped the ice with her hand during a crooked triple flip but went on to land two more triple jumps flawlessly. "A year ago, I don't think she could have done that," says Carly.

Gold has one bit of anxiety remaining. She admits to being awed by the Olympic champion, Kim. "She's so smooth," Gold says. "She isn't just piecing jumps together; she has one complete program where everything flows together. It's beautiful and that's how I want to skate."

At last year's worlds in London, Ont., where she finished sixth, Gold happened to enter a restaurant where Kim, the champion, was eating. She wanted to approach her idol for a photo. "I was too chicken," she says. "Do I want to be a fan like that? Eh."

Gold would prefer to engage Kim while both are on the podium, perhaps in Sochi. "It would be so cool to find the cameras first," Gracie says, "and tell her, 'Yu-na, look over there.'"

It would be, shall we say, a Golden moment. □