

WINTER
OLYMPICS
2022



A Return To Beijing

The winter edition of the Olympics returns about six months after the summer games concluded, and history will be made: Beijing will become the first city to host both editions, having earlier played host to the 2008 summer games.

The Olympics begin on Feb. 4 with the usual gala opening ceremonies, coinciding with the most important holiday celebrated by the host country — Chinese New Year, which begins on Feb. 1.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

America's top athletes will be on skates and snowboards instead of sneakers and surfboards, competing in a record 109 events across seven sports. Included are familiar sports like figure skating, ice hockey, bobsledding, curling and the luge, as well as seven new events. Beijing 2022 will see the debut of mixed-team freestyle aerial skiing, women's single-person bobsled, the "big air" freestyle for both men and women, snowboard cross, ski jumping and a mixed short-track speed-skating relay. They'll be competing with some heavy-hitting counter-programming: The winter games are overlapping with the Super Bowl this year.



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OPENING AND CLOSING

Many of those who don't follow sports still tune in for the spectacle and beauty of the opening ceremonies. This year's event takes place on Feb. 4 at the National Stadium in Beijing. Known colloquially as the "Birds Nest," this venue served the same role for the 2008 Beijing summer games. China is 13 hours ahead of America's Eastern time zone, so live coverage will take place on NBC's digital plat-

forms. Look for time-delayed coverage on national television that evening. Spectators will be present in Beijing, unlike in last summer's opening ceremony in Tokyo — but because of pandemic protocols, only spectators from mainland China can attend. The games then continue until Feb. 20.

THE VENUES

The National Stadium will go dark after the opening cer-

emonies, as Olympic action shifts to three different zones: Beijing, Yanqing and Zhangjiakou. Ice sports will take place in Beijing, where six venues are located. Many of these spaces are being repurposed from the 2008 summer games, with the air ramp and speed-skating arena as new additions.

Yanqing, a mountainous suburb that's about 45 miles northwest of Beijing, features two venues that will host

Alpine skiing and sliding sports.

Zhangjiakou is past Yanqing, more than 100 miles northwest of Beijing, and is also accessible by high-speed train. This popular ski Chinese ski destination includes four venues to host all remaining snow events. Each area has its own repurposed athlete village; they'll be converted into public housing and office space after the games are completed.

Shaun White: Ageless Wonder

Once famously dubbed the Flying Tomato, snowboard halfpiper Shaun White arrives in Beijing as the 35-year-old elder statesman of his youth-oriented sport.

He claimed his first gold medal back in the 2006 winter games at Torino, his second by dominating the halfpipe in Vancouver in 2010, and then his most recent gold medal in 2018's Pyeongchang games.

That win was historic in more ways than one, as White helped America to its 100th total gold in the Winter Olympics. He'd taken a lengthy hiatus this year before making the U.S. Grand Prix in March his first event since the 2018 Olympics. White is now attempting to become the first snowboarder to claim four gold medals in the winter games, despite stiff competition from Ayumu Hirano, Scotty James and Yuto Totsuka.

Still, the question of whether this is his final attempt to claim gold continued to loom.

"Will this be my last games? I don't know," White said at a pre-Olympics news conference. "I always say it might be, just because that's how it feels and then. ... I'm thinking, 'Gosh, I feel pretty good. I'm motivated, I'm excited.'



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And then, boom, I'm at the next Olympics, so I wouldn't count the next one out after this."

White missed the X Games in January 2021 at Aspen after a knee injury, but underscored his readiness to compete in this year's Olympic Games during the U.S. Grand

Prix, completing four spins plus two off-axis rotations. He then joined the rest of America's snowboarding team in Saas-Fee, Switzerland, as training continued for these games.

His stumble in 2014 at Sochi, where White somehow came away with no medals, is

in the rear-view mirror. (He attempted to win two golds in Russia, training for both the halfpipe and the newly announced slopestyle event — then ended up with neither.)

In fact, White is already peeking ahead to the Winter Games in 2026 at Milano

Cortina in Italy, where he'd be extending his incredible run at the sport's oldest competitor.

"I wear it now as somewhat of a badge of honor, in a sense," White told Forbes. "To be on top of a sport that's ever-changing for this amount of time has been a challenge. It's been my life's work."

Mikaela Shiffrin: Musical Skier

Already in her third Winter Olympics, Mikaela Shiffrin is on pace to become the more celebrated Alpine skier in American history.

The music-loving 26-year-old was the youngest to reach her 60th World Cup title, and was the first skier ever to win in all six categories of the sport — downhill, combined, giant slalom, parallel, slalom and super-G.

Her stirring run of dominance began with a gold medal in Sochi at 18. She remains the gold-medal favorite in slalom and giant slalom at Beijing, after claiming her 70th career World Cup trophy in October. She'll be a prime contender in any other event she enters too, as Shiffrin eyes every notable Alpine record.

Standing in the way at these Olympic Games is Petra Vlhova of Slovakia, who bested Shiffrin in two of the first three races of 2021. They were neck and neck at this year's World Cup event in Killington, Vermont, just an hour from Shiffrin's childhood home in New Hampshire, before Vlhova fell behind by 75-hundredths of a second.

Shiffrin has more than a new rival to contend with in Beijing. She's also been battling what she called "a very severe muscle spasm or kind of a strain" in her back. That has limited her ability to train, but it's not something new for Shiffrin. She missed time last year with an unrelated back issue, before re-injuring herself while winning the giant slalom at this season's opening World Cup competition in Sölden, Austria.

She traces these problems back to a fall that happened when Shiffrin was 9, but doesn't use any of it as an excuse. She joined the World Cup circuit just a few years later, and won her first race in 2012. Today, only Lindsey Vonn (82) and Ingemar Stenmark (86) have more World Cup wins.

Downtime is often spent with music, as Shiffrin sings, writes her own lyrics and plays guitar. It's a passion she shared with her father Jeff, a constant companion and huge supporter who died in 2020 after a home accident. Dad played multiple instruments, and shared a wide range of classic records with her from the Beach Boys and Jimmy Buffett to Paul Simon.

Those songs provided refuge as Shiffrin mourned. She ultimately decided to create the Jeff Shiffrin Athlete Resiliency Fund, which has already raised more than \$3 million to help with training and competition expenses for those impacted by the pandemic.



What's New This Year

Seven of 109 medal events at the 2022 Winter Games will make their debut, including several mixed-team events — a recent Olympic trend.

Here's a look at what's new in Beijing.

MEN/WOMEN'S FREESKI 'BIG AIR'

Big air snowboarding debuted at Pyeongchang in 2018, opening the door for both men and women freeskiers to take part at these COVID-delayed Winter Games. Freeski Big Air rose to popularity in the Winter X Games, using a format that's similar to big air snowboarding with a course that includes one large jump. Competitors have three attempts to do their best tricks in the final, with their two best counting toward the total score. Each attempt must feature a different trick.

MIXED-TEAM AERIALS

Aerials have been mostly individual competitions, but Beijing introduces a team event. Each team includes three athletes, with at least one woman and one man required. Scores from all three are compiled to arrive at a team score, as competition continues over multiple rounds.

MIXED-TEAM SHORT TRACK RELAY

The Winter Olympics schedule already features men's 5000-meter and women's 3000-meter relays. Two men and two women from each country take part in this new relay. Women go first for two-and-a-half laps each, followed by the men for another two-and-a-half. Then the women and men both compete over two more additional laps, for a total of 2000 meters. Should



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an athlete fall, only a teammate of the same gender may take over to finish that leg.

MIXED-TEAM SKI JUMPING

Ski jumping, which became a men's Olympic team event in 1988, is now joined by a mixed-team event that finds the group jumping in the order of woman, man, woman and then man. All individual scores are then added together to arrive at a team score.

WOMEN'S MONOBOB

This sounds like what it is, a one-female version of traditional multi-person bobsledding events.

Every athlete will be responsible for pushing and then piloting the sled over the course.

This event requires that all competitors use identical sleds, unlike team-focused bobsledding which relies heavily on individual designs aimed at improving aerodynamics.

MIXED-TEAM SNOWBOARD CROSS

One male and one female are paired together from each participating country in this new snowboard cross event. Men race first and as they cross the finish line, a staggered start is created when the starting gate opens for their teammate. Women then complete the race. Mick Dierdorff and Lindsey Jacobellis won the first-ever world title for America in the 2019 event debut.

Figure Skating Preview

Figure skating in the Olympics dates back to the 1908 edition in London, though curiously it used to be part of the summer edition.

The event was finally moved to the winter program after the 1920 games at Antwerp in Belgium, first being held in the winter of 1924 at the French city of Chamonix. Five events are part of the 2022 Beijing games: individual competitions for both men and women, pairs, the team event and ice dancing. Here's a look at the major story lines.

MEN'S SINGLES

Figure skating is defined by rising to the moment, as perfection — or something close to it — is required for those hoping to claim a gold medal. Japan's Hanyu Yuzuru is as close as it gets, after finishing first in the Olympics held in 2014 at Sochi and at PyeongChang in 2018. He also claimed world championships in 2014 and 2017 along the way, setting up heavy expectations for a third consecutive title in men's singles — a feat last achieved way back in 1928. Nathan Chen, an American who won world championships in 2018-19 and 2021, is his principal competitor at Beijing. A bronze medalist in 2018, Chen won the next 14 straight events he entered. He took a leave of absence at Yale University to compete in China.

WOMEN'S SINGLES

Russians Alina Zagitova and Evgenia Medvedeva are getting all the buzz after winning both gold and silver in women's singles at

PyeongChang. The Japanese duo of Satoko Miyahara and Rika Kihira are also garnering raves in advance of Beijing. From America, Bay Area-based Alysa Liu arrives having won her initial national titles in 2019 and 2020. The 16-year-old earned her spot after claiming the Nebelhorn Trophy. She's the first junior female American singles skater to complete a triple axel

in international competition.

PAIRS

Unlike the men's and women's singles, pairs in figure skating is considered something of an open competition in Beijing — principally because reigning champs Bruno Massot and Aljona Savchenko of Germany ended up retiring. Attention has turned to

Cong Han and Wenjing Sui of China; they won the silver in 2018, and are two-time world champions.

ICE DANCING

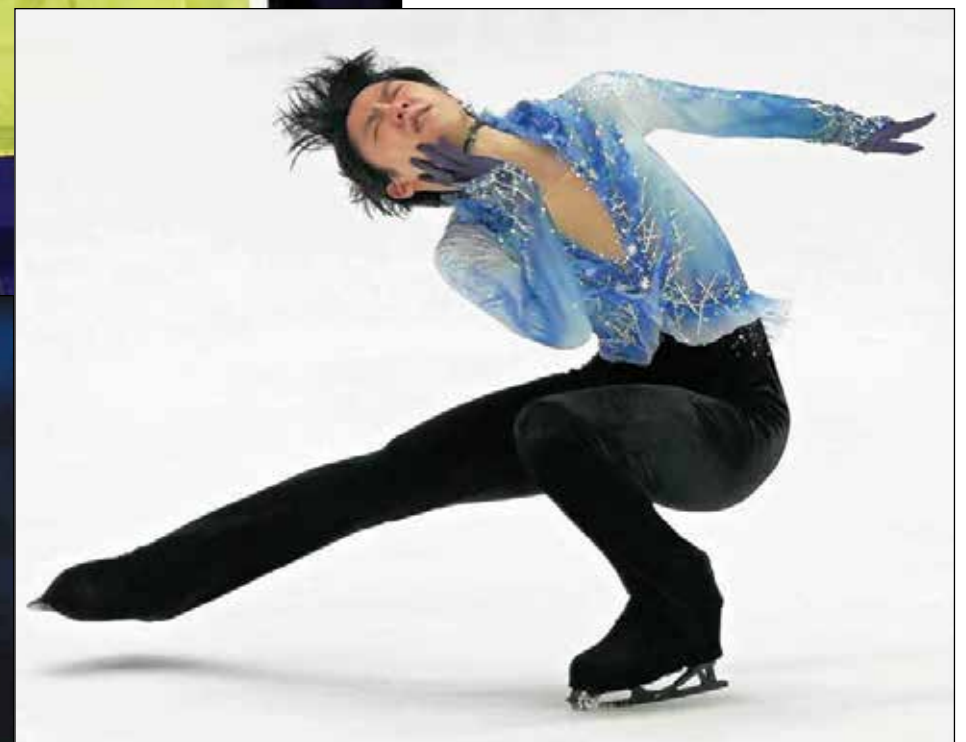
France's Guillaume Cizeron and Gabriella Papadakis arrive in Beijing as prohibitive favorites, based on their silver-medal finish at the Olympics in 2018. They're also four-time world champs.



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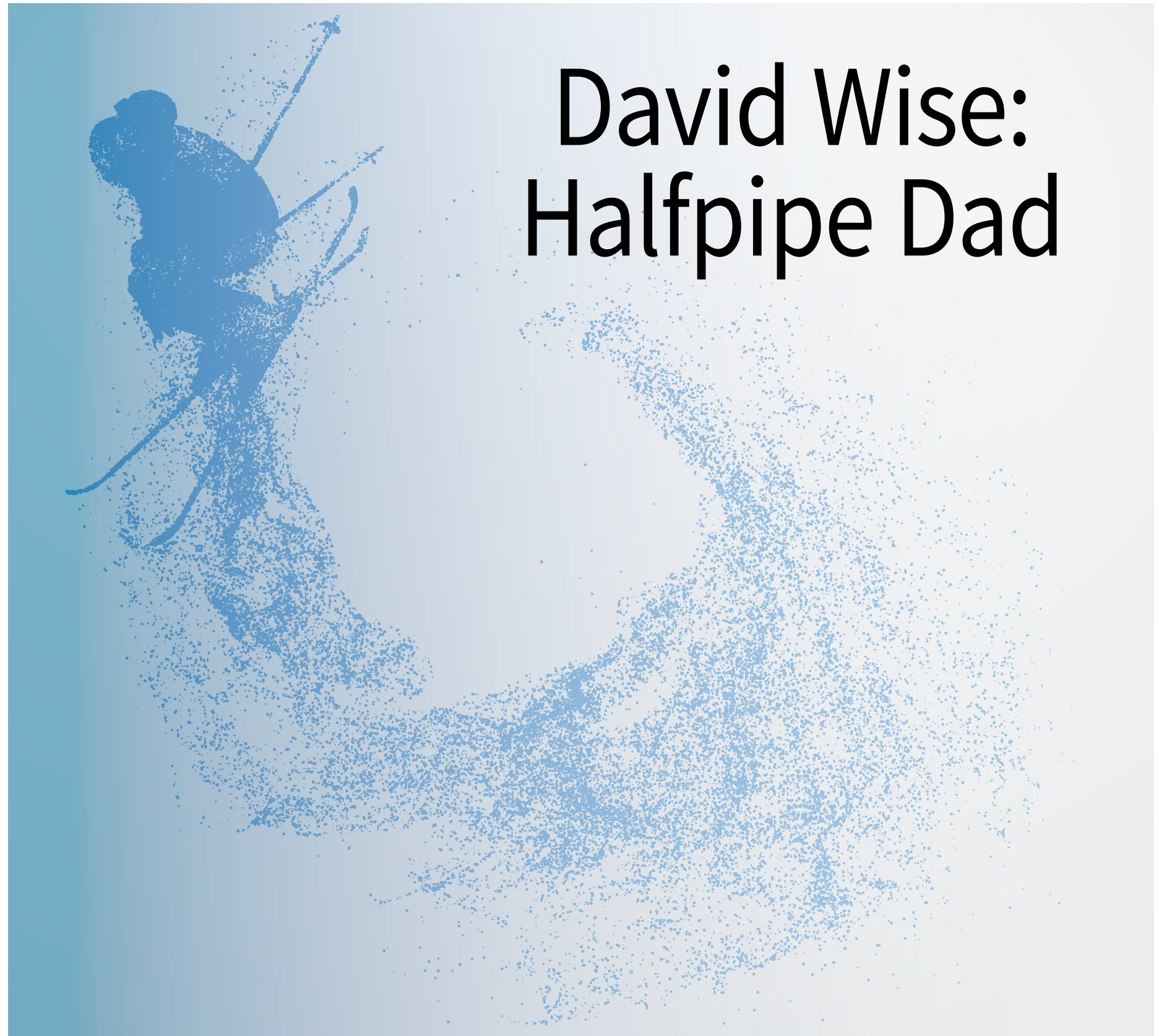
David Wise has seen it all during a celebrated career. The only man who's ever won Olympic gold in halfpipe skiing, he's also dealt with unimaginable loss along the way.

Now, this father of two is trying for three in a row against a group of younger competitors, including Alex Ferreira, who won silver in 2018. Wise has also claimed four X Games championships (2012-14, 2018), in a career that began with his first national title at 15. Now 31, Wise is mounting a stirring comeback after breaking his femur in 2019.

He'd become the first to win three-straight X Games wins since Tanner Hall's memorable three-peat in 2006-08. But the years between Wise's 2014 medal at the inaugural men's halfpipe skiing event in Sochi and winning the gold at Pyeongchang in 2018 presented even bigger challenges.

His wife Alexandra's father died; they lost a grandmother, too. Wise's sister Christy survived a scary boating accident, but was left without a leg. A member of Wise's youth group died by suicide. At one point, Wise feared his son might die, too. Malachi, then about 18 months old, began suddenly convulsing while Wise was in Norway competing in the Oslo X Games. Alexandra rushed him to the doctor, where he was diagnosed with a febrile seizure.

There were the usual should-



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der and back injuries along the way, and two concussions. At one point, Wise admitted that he'd been no more than 85 percent well in years.

He claimed a fourth X Games superpipe championship in 2018, but then initially struggled at PyeongChang —

failing to complete his first two runs while he struggling with a binding malfunction. Wise came alive on his third and final attempt, landing two head-over-heels flips to score a career-best 97.20 for his second gold medal.

Having come all the way

back, Wise then took some needed time away to be with Alexandra and their kids. A devout Christian, Wise met his wife at a church youth camp — and has often said in interviews that faith and family are his ultimate guides.

His sister Christy, an Air

Force captain, has been just as determined in her recovery. She became the first female amputee to return to flying duty, while also co-founding the One Leg Up On Life Foundation to provide prosthetics to underprivileged kids.

Chloe Kim: Ivy-League Snowboarder

Not many people walk away when they are at the top of their profession, even for a couple of years.

That's just what snowboarder Chloe Kim did, leaving behind women's snowboarding for 22 months to attend Princeton University.

She also used the time to rehab a broken ankle, and is now ready, rested and undoubtedly a lot more well read in advance of the 2022 Winter Games at Beijing.

A bit superstitious, Kim knocks on her board before every competition to break any jinxes. The number of knocks, she's said, depends on how nervous she is about the run. If history is any guide, however, Kim shouldn't be.

Based on scores alone, she'd likely have qualified for the U.S. Olympic Team all the way back in 2014, and probably would have been favored to claim the gold medal. Unfortunately, Kim didn't yet meet the age requirement. Instead, she claimed two medals in the slopestyle and halfpipe at the youth games at Lillehammer in 2016.

Two years later, she won Olympic gold at just 17. Kim was already the first to win three X Games titles before the age of 16. She's also the first woman to accomplish back-to-back 1080s in the halfpipe.

Following her medal triumph at Pyeongchang, she



ANDY MIAH/FLICKR

won the Dew Tour, the next X Games and a world championship before the ankle issue ended her season. She suffered the injury after a rough landing at the Burton U.S. Open.

By then, she'd already announced her acceptance to

Princeton. But the sabbatical did nothing to damage her competitive spirit, as Kim continued to live up to the nickname her parents gave her long ago: "Ipugi," a hybrid word that they translate from Korean as "baby girl dragon."

Kim announced her return

to snowboarding with a win at the Lax Open in January 2021, then won an amazing sixth title in the halfpipe at the X Games.

With school and career still waiting, however, Kim has made it clear that Beijing will likely be her last Olympics.

She'd be 26, Kim notes, and more prone to injury. More than that, she has newfound desire to find her next self: "I want to be a lawyer," Kim told *The New York Times*. "I want to be a scientist, a doctor — all of these crazy things I want to try."