

BEIJING OLYMPICS

Minnesota's Olympians



Giorgia Birkeland

SPEEDSKATING
WHITE BEAR LAKE

After Birkeland, 19, won the women's mass start at the long track Olympic trials, second-place finisher Mia Manganello Kilburg called the teen "a huge star to come." Birkeland was added to the Olympic roster as a coaches' discretionary selection. In only her second season on the national team, Birkeland is by far the youngest member of the women's Olympic team. A speedskater since the age of 8, she honed her racing skills with St. Paul's Midway Speedskating Club. Birkeland, a Mahtomedi High School graduate, now lives and trains in Park City, Utah.

Olympic Games: First



Megan Bozek

HOCKEY • GOPHERS

The Illinois native won back-to-back national titles with the Gophers in 2012 and 2013, captaining the team in the latter victory as a senior. The 30-year-old defenseman went on to play in the CWHL and NWHL before playing in a Russian/Chinese professional league, where she won that trophy in 2020. She won a silver medal in the 2014 Winter Games in Sochi but was one of the last two cuts from the 2018 roster. But she has won gold at the world championships four times (2013, 2016, 2017 and 2019). "I just knew I wasn't done," Bozek told Chicago's WGN9 last November. "I felt like I had something to really prove to myself."

Olympic Games: 2014



Hannah Brandt

HOCKEY • VADNAIS HEIGHTS

The 28-year-old is a veteran of the U.S. women's team, having claimed gold in the 2018 Games as well as world championships in 2015, 2017 and 2019. Brandt was the 2012 Minnesota Ms. Hockey at Hill-Murray before winning national championships with the Gophers in 2013, 2015 and 2016. The center played in the NWHL for the Minnesota Whitecaps but has focused on opportunities with the Professional Women's Hockey Players Association the past two seasons. Four years ago at the Olympics, she skated on a line with former Gophers teammates Dani Cameranesi and Amanda Kessel. Both are also on this year's team.

Olympic Games: 2018



Jake Brown

BIATHLON • ST. PAUL

The U.S. has never won an Olympic medal in biathlon, which combines cross-country skiing and rifle shooting. Brown, 29, is among three Winter Games rookies on a team hoping to capture some historic hardware. A graduate of Minnehaha Academy, Brown earned All-America honors in cross-country, track and field, and Nordic skiing at St. Olaf College. He excelled as a cross-country runner, finishing eighth at the 2013 NCAA Division III championships and helping the Oles to the team title. Brown added biathlon to his sports menu in 2014 and has competed at three world championships, placing 12th in the men's sprint in 2021.

Olympic Games: First



Dani Cameranesi

HOCKEY • PLYMOUTH

Cameranesi was the 2013 Ms. Hockey after playing at Blake and spun that into becoming national rookie of the year with the Gophers the next season. She won NCAA titles there as a sophomore and junior. After graduating, she played one season with the NWHL's Buffalo Beauts before also joining the PWHPA. The 26-year-old forward was part of that 2018 Olympic squad that won gold, and she won world championships with Team USA in 2015 and 2019. Cameranesi, like the rest of her Olympic team, has been training at the Super Rink in Blaine for the past several months ahead of the Games.

Olympic Games: 2018

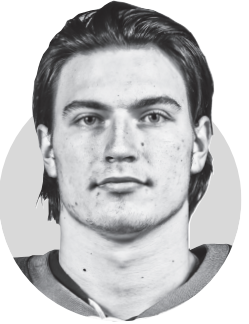


Sam Hentges

HOCKEY • NEW BRIGHTON

The versatile Hentges, 22, excelled in second- and third-line roles in 2020-21 for St. Cloud State, contributing eight goals and nine assists as the Huskies advanced to the NCAA championship game for the first time. This season, he has been limited to 10 games but had six goals and seven assists entering Saturday. A seventh-round draft pick of the Wild in 2018, Hentges had 10 goals and 10 assists as a freshman in 2018-19. He will be joined in Beijing by St. Cloud State coach Brett Larson, who is serving as an assistant coach for Team USA.

Olympic Games: First



Matthew Knies

HOCKEY • GOPHERS

The Gophers' loss will be Team USA's gain as Knies, 19, and linemate Ben Meyers are off to Beijing and will miss three February series. A freshman from Phoenix, Knies has shown few growing pains for Minnesota, contributing nine goals and 15 assists in 25 games entering Saturday. Knies is a 2021 second-round draft pick by the Toronto Maple Leafs, and he honed his skills during two years with the Tri-City Storm of the USHL, amassing 31 goals and 56 assists. He also won a bronze medal with the U.S. Junior Select Team in 2019.

Olympic Games: First



John Landsteiner

CURLING • DULUTH

The Mapleton native is the quietest member of Team Shuster, which might be why he's been described as the most underrated. As the team's lead, Landsteiner throws the first stones of each end, and does so with consistency and accuracy. He's been part of Shuster's foursome since 2011, winning Olympic gold in 2018 and a world championship bronze in 2016. That continued a record of success that started with multiple U.S. junior medals and three Minnesota high school titles. An integrity engineer, he was USA Curling's athlete of the year in 2014.

Olympic Games: 2014, 2018



Amanda Kessel

HOCKEY • GOPHERS

Kessel won an Olympic silver medal in 2014 and gold in 2018 with Team USA. She won three national titles with the Gophers (2012, 2013, 2016). The Wisconsin native earned the 2013 Patty Kazmaier Award as the top women's collegiate player but sat out the next season while battling concussion symptoms. She came back late in the 2015-16 campaign and scored the winning goal in that national championship game. She played two seasons in the NWHL. The 30-year-old forward's older brother is NHL winger Phil Kessel.

Olympic Games: 2014, 2018



Ben Meyers

HOCKEY • DELANO

If there has been a Most Valuable Player for the Gophers this season, it's Meyers, who entered Saturday as the team's scoring leader with 10 goals and 15 assists, along with three game-winning goals. Meyers, 23, came up clutch against Michigan on Jan. 22, scoring the winning goal in overtime. He went undrafted by NHL teams but is sure to receive attention as a college free agent. Meyers ranks eighth in Minnesota state history with 278 career points. He led the Fargo Force to the 2018 Clark Cup as USHL champions.

Olympic Games: First



Nick Perbix

HOCKEY • ELK RIVER

A senior defenseman, Perbix helped St. Cloud State reach its first NCAA championship game in 2021 by collecting seven goals and 16 assists last season, tied for fourth nationally among defensemen. Perbix had two goals and 18 assists entering Saturday, including a series with a goal and seven assists against Miami (Ohio) and a four-assist game against North Dakota. The 23-year-old is a sixth-round pick of the Tampa Bay Lightning in 2017 and will be making his first appearance on a U.S. national team in Beijing.

Olympic Games: First



Tabitha Peterson

CURLING • EAGAN

Though Peterson, 32, isn't an Olympic rookie, she will be seeing the Games from a fresh perspective in Beijing. The vice-skip for Team Nina Roth at the 2018 Pyeongchang Games, Peterson became the team's skip in 2020 when Roth stepped away for maternity leave. Peterson kept that position when Roth returned, with great success. A U.S. champion in 2012, she skipped her team to bronze at last spring's world championships, and Team Peterson is ranked sixth in the world going into Beijing. When she's not curling, Peterson works as a pharmacist.

Olympic Games: 2018



Tara Peterson

CURLING • EAGAN

As teenagers, the Peterson sisters played together in the junior ranks, winning two U.S. titles. Tara, 30, and her older sister, Tabitha, reunited in 2018 and picked up where they left off. When Aileen Geving took time off to have a baby following the 2018 Olympics, Tara stepped in to play lead, helping the team to the 2020 U.S. title. The foursome won bronze at the 2021 worlds. While Peterson, a dentist, describes herself as the "wild, fun" member of the team, Tabitha said her sister has worked tirelessly throughout her career to earn her place at the Olympics.

Olympic Games: First



Chris Plys

CURLING • DULUTH

Plys, 34, will pull double duty in Beijing, competing with Vicky Persinger in mixed doubles and with Team Shuster in the men's tournament. It's a daunting schedule that could keep him on the ice for up to 18 days. As an alternate at the 2010 Vancouver Games, Plys was inserted when skip John Shuster struggled. He made it to the Olympic trials finals in 2018, then joined Shuster's team when vice-skip Tyler George left after the Pyeongchang Games. With Plys on board, Team Shuster finished fifth at the 2019 and 2021 world championships.

Olympic Games: 2010 (alternate)



Maddie Rooney

HOCKEY • ANDOVER

The 24-year-old was a breakout star of the 2018 Winter Games, acting as the starting goaltender as the U.S. went on to win gold. She stopped the last-round shot in the shootout against Canada to win Team USA's first gold since 1998. She endured a lower-body injury last August that knocked her out of 2021's world championships, but still made this year's roster. She played for Andover's girls' and boys' teams in high school before going on to feature for Minnesota Duluth collegiately. She finished her career there as the school's all-time leader in saves.

Olympic Games: 2018

REPPIN' THE NORTH

Since the 2002 Winter Games, the number of athletes with ties to the state has remained above 20. A look at the past five class sizes:

2002 SALT LAKE CITY
26 athletes



2006 TURIN
34 athletes



2010 VANCOUVER
22 athletes



2014 SOCHI
26 athletes



2018 PYEONGCHANG
23 athletes

