

BEIJING OLYMPICS

The contingent with Minnesota connections on Team USA is the largest since Turin in 2006 and includes nine gold medalists from four years ago

Compiled by RACHEL BLOUNT, RANDY JOHNSON and MEGAN RYAN • Star Tribune



Noah Cates

HOCKEY • STILLWATER

A two-year captain and senior forward for Minnesota Duluth, Cates, 22, helped UMD win its second consecutive NCAA championship as a freshman in 2019 by contributing nine goals and 14 assists. He followed with a 14-goal, 19-assist campaign in the COVID-shortened 2019-20 season during which he earned second-team All-America honors. Last season, the Bulldogs returned to the Frozen Four, and Cates had five goals and 14 assists. Cates, a fifth-round draft pick of the Philadelphia Flyers in 2017, helped the United States win a silver medal in the 2019 World Junior Championship.

Olympic Games: First



Jessie Diggins

SKIING • AFTON

Diggins won't carry the weight of history in Beijing, as she did in the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics. In those Games, she and Kikkan Randall delivered a breakthrough gold in the team sprint, bringing the U.S. women's cross-country program its first Olympic medal. She will face a different kind of pressure this time, but it won't be less heavy. Diggins enters the Beijing Games as a defending gold medalist and the reigning World Cup overall champion, and she sits third in the World Cup overall standings. A contender for multiple medals in Beijing, she is expected to race in several events.

Olympic Games: 2014, 2018



Brock Faber

HOCKEY • MAPLE GROVE

Faber, a smooth-skating defenseman, has extensive experience with USA Hockey, spending two years at the National Team Development Program and skating with several national teams, including the gold medal-winning junior team in 2021. He was skating for Team USA in the World Junior Championship this winter, but that tournament was canceled after only one game for the United States. With the Gophers, Faber, 19, has two goals and nine assists this season. A 2020 second-round draft pick by the Los Angeles Kings, Faber had one goal and 11 assists as a freshman in 2020-21.

Olympic Games: First



Aileen Geving

CURLING (ALT.) • DULUTH

A member of Roth's team at the Pyeongchang Olympics, Geving will return to the Games as alternate for the same group. Her new role came after she took a leave to have her first child, Sienna, born in late 2018. Geving grew up in a curling family, learning the game at age 10 from her father, Seppo Sormunen, a successful curler at the club and senior levels. She competed in three Olympic trials before reaching the Winter Games. Geving is known for her analytical mind — she graduated from Minnesota Duluth with a degree in organizational management — and her steady, calm demeanor.

Olympic Games: 2018



Drew Helleison

HOCKEY • FARMINGTON

A junior defenseman at Boston College, Helleison, 20, earned second-team All-America honors last season after collecting 15 points on four goals and 11 assists. He assisted on three game-winning goals for the Eagles and finished plus-23 to rank third in the country. This season, he had two goals and 16 assists in 24 games. The 2019 second-round draft pick of the Colorado Avalanche is a veteran of several U.S. national teams, including the 2021 World Juniors gold medalists. Helleison spent two years at Shattuck-St. Mary's in Faribault, amassing 12 goals and 59 assists.

Olympic Games: First



Paula Moltzan

SKIING • PRIOR LAKE

When Moltzan lost her place on the U.S. ski team in 2017, she didn't give up. She went to the University of Vermont, won an NCAA slalom title and worked her way back onto the national team. That tenacity made her a first-time Olympian at age 27 in the slalom and giant slalom. After learning to race at Buck Hill, Moltzan moved to Colorado and won a world junior championship in slalom in 2015. During her second stint on the U.S. ski team, she won her first World Cup medal — a silver in parallel slalom — last season. She is a biology major at Vermont.

Olympic Games: First



Abbey Murphy

HOCKEY • GOPHERS

At 19, Murphy is one of the youngest players on this Olympic team. She should be in her second year with the Gophers, but she took the season off to focus on the Games. In her freshman year, she made the WCHA All-Rookie team and had eight goals and 10 assists while appearing in all 20 games. The Illinois native has international experience, including winning silver at the 2021 world championships. Team USA coach Joel Johnson said the forward "brings a tremendous amount of speed and skill to the game," and is a dynamic, deceptive player.

Olympic Games: First



Aaron Ness

HOCKEY • ROSEAU

More than a decade removed from his time as a Gophers defenseman, Ness, 31, has kept his professional career going in the AHL. He is in his first season with the Providence Bruins and had nine assists in 31 games. Ness was a second-round draft pick of the New York Islanders in 2008 and has one goal and six assists in 72 career NHL games with the Islanders, Washington Capitals and Arizona Coyotes. Most of his pro career has been in the AHL, where he has 45 goals and 224 assists in 516 games.

Olympic Games: First



Leif Nordgren

**BIATHLON
MARINE ON ST. CROIX**

The youngest men's biathlete on the 2014 U.S. Olympic team, Nordgren, now 32, will enter the Beijing Games as the oldest. He has two Olympics and nine world titles to his credit. At the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics, the graduate of Forest Lake High School helped the Americans to a sixth-place finish in the men's relay, matching the best U.S. finish in the event's history. In 2019, Nordgren began training with the Vermont National Guard's biathlon program; an aviation operations specialist, he plans to become a pilot.

Olympic Games: 2014, 2018



Kelly Pannek

HOCKEY • PLYMOUTH

The Benilde-St. Margaret's product spent four seasons with the Gophers from 2014 to 2019, taking the 2017-18 season off to win gold in Pyeongchang. She won the national title as a sophomore, after leading all freshmen a season prior with 44 points (14 goals, 30 assists). She topped the nation in scoring as a junior with 62 points in 39 games. While hockey became the 26-year-old's primary sport, she was the 2013 Ms. Soccer in Minnesota. In her prep hockey career, she famously scored a natural hat trick in 22 seconds, which set a state record back in 2012.

Olympic Games: 2018



Paul Schommer

**BIATHLON
ST. SCHOLASTICA**

Schommer, 29, didn't pick up cross-country skiing until his sophomore year of high school. From Appleton, Wis., he hit his stride at St. Scholastica in Duluth, finishing eighth in the 20K freestyle at the 2014 NCAA championships. At the urging of Saints coach Chad Salmela, Schommer attended a talent identification camp for U.S. Biathlon in 2014, which soon led to a place on the national team. He qualified for the Olympic biathlon team in November, when he finished 22nd in the 20K individual race at a World Cup event.

Olympic Games: First



John Shuster

CURLING • CHISHOLM

In 2018, Shuster delivered the most famous shot in American curling history, a massive five-point throw that brought the U.S. its first Olympic gold medal in curling. The Minnesota Duluth graduate has kept his team at the top of the U.S. men's standings ever since. Shuster was a relative youngster when he helped Pete Fenson's team win Olympic bronze in 2006; he became skip of his own team shortly after, persevering through disappointing Olympic results in 2010 and 2014 before capturing the gold. He has played in 10 world championships.

Olympic Games: 2006, '10, '14, '18



Nathan Smith

HOCKEY

MINNESOTA ST. MANKATO

Smith entered Saturday as the nation's leading scorer for the top-ranked Mavericks, with 15 goals and 25 assists for 40 points. The junior from Hudson, Fla., helped Minnesota State reach its first Frozen Four in 2021, compiling nine goals and 16 assists. Smith, 23, was a third-round draft pick of the Winnipeg Jets in 2018. He spent two seasons with Cedar Rapids of the USHL, collecting 35 goals and 65 assists in 104 games. He will be joined in Beijing by Minnesota State Coach Mike Hastings, an assistant coach for Team USA.

Olympic Games: First



Lee Stecklein

HOCKEY • ROSEVILLE

Along with her two Olympic medals (silver in 2014 and gold in 2018), the defenseman also has six world championship medals, including five golds. The 27-year-old product of Roseville High School won an NCAA title in 2013 as a freshman with the Gophers before taking the next season off for the Olympics; she was the youngest member of Team USA in Sochi. She returned for her final three seasons, becoming a first-team All-America her senior year and winning two more national championships. At 6 feet, Stecklein is Team USA's tallest player.

Olympic Games: 2014, 2018



Grace Zumwinkle

HOCKEY • EXCELSIOR

The Olympic debutante was the 2017 Ms. Hockey playing for Breck School and also earned USA Today's Girls Hockey Player of the Year award that year. She also won two state doubles titles and a team championship as a prep tennis player. The forward was one of the Gophers' most prolific scorers from 2017 to '21. While Zumwinkle has already completed four years with the Gophers, she could still return after the Olympics thanks to the extra year of eligibility from the pandemic. The 22-year-old's sister Emily is a Gophers freshman.

Olympic Games: First

INDIVIDUAL MEDALS

Since the 2002 Winter Games, Olympians with Minnesota ties have won 46 medals, with 14 gold, 19 silver and 13 bronze.

2002 SALT LAKE CITY
7 silver medals



2006 TURIN
12 bronze medals



2010 VANCOUVER
1 gold, 7 silver medals



2014 SOCHI
5 silver medals



2018 PYEONGCHANG
13 gold, 1 bronze medal

