

Four years after Cha Junhwan was a 16-year-old skating at his home Olympics at PyeongChang 2018, the South Korean skater is within striking distance of the men's figure skating podium. Now 20, Cha was glittering in his "Fate of the Clockmaker" program, finishing behind Nathan Chen, Kagiyama Yuma and Uno Shoma in the men's short at the Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022 on Tuesday (8 February). "I feel really happy about my performance today," said Cha after his skate inside the Capital Indoor Stadium. "Because this is [the] Olympics I was quite nervous but I was really trying to control and manage it well... so I'm very satisfied and happy about it." Happy, too, is coach Brian Orser, the two-time Olympic silver medallist who had trained Cha in Toronto prior to the pandemic. The two have worked together over video and phone calls the last two years with Cha back in Korea. "His career is starting to peak and mature. I'm proud of him, especially with what we've been through," Orser told Olympics.com earlier this week. "He's taken all of our skills and he's putting it to good use and I can trust that he's doing all those things that we've been working on in the last six years." Those skills were on display Tuesday in Beijing, Cha opening with a quadruple Salchow and then hitting an impressive triple Lutz-triple loop combination. He closed with a triple Axel, but also received Level 4s (the highest) for each of his spins and his step sequence. He scored a 99.51 for fourth, a career-best tally. Brian Orser: "You need to put it out there every time." Cha is riding a wave of momentum: He won the biggest title of his career last month at the Four Continents Championships behind two solid programs. Orser said while that is a result to build off of, it's about consistency. "When you're still pretty new, you need to put it out there every time," Orser said. "And then [those watching] go, 'Hmm.' I think a top-six finish here or higher... it's very doable. The programs are great. The choreography is great. That makes my job easier. He's refreshing to watch, but he still has to do his job." Cha's job on Thursday (10 February) will be clean skating: He only does two quadruple jumps in the free skate compared with four or five of the top-ranked men, like Chen, Kagiyama and Uno. A clean technical program will be helped by his program component marks, which Cha has earned a strong reputation for. He was 15th at the Games in 2018, and finished in 10th at the world championships last year to help book two spots for Korea here. "Before competing today, I asked myself, 'What do I really want from this?'" He said. "And that was to be satisfied and enjoy being in the Olympics - the global festival. [That] led me to a good result today. I'll continue focusing in the free skate and bring a good result." Cha, a super star in his home country, feels the support - and weight - of his supporters. "I'll do my best to show a performance that will bring energy to those who are supporting me," he said. "As the short program went well, I'll manage my condition and try to break my personal record in the free program and show a performance that I can be satisfied with and enjoy."