

# Naperville skater ready to hit the Olympic ice

## Naperville's Lysacek aims to skate for gold after local doc helps with ankle problem

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By PAUL LaTOUR For Sun-Times Media

When Dr. Robert Weil first met Evan Lysacek, Weil had no idea he was looking at a future Olympian, let alone a possible gold medalist. After all, Lysacek wasn't even a teenager yet.

Weil, a local sports podiatrist known as The Sports Doctor, was doing foot screenings at an area ice rink when he began talking with his friend, Candy Brown Burek, a figure skating coach who introduced him to a promising young skater from Naperville. It turned out to be Lysacek.

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**Evan Lysacek of Naperville skates during men's figure skating practice for the Vancouver 2010 Olympics in Vancouver, British Columbia, on Saturday.**

*(David J. Phillip/The Associated Press)*

"He was always a terrific kid," said Weil, who has a monthly column in The Sun. "(But) I never realized he was the competitor he is. He's the best in the world. Wow!"

Lysacek is out to prove it again this week at the Winter Olympics in Vancouver. Lysacek, the reigning world champion, is among the favorites to earn a medal when the men's figure skating competition begins Tuesday night with the short program. It concludes Thursday.

After finishing fourth in the 2006 Winter Olympics, history is on his side. An American has won gold every time he enters the Olympics as a reigning world champion. The last to pull it off was Brian Boitano in 1988.

But Weil said Lysacek understands what he's up against in a field that features the return of defending gold medalist Evgeni Plushenko and U.S. champion Jeremy Abbott.

"It is a battle -- the men's field is loaded," Weil said. "I'm a wreck. I'm not even there and I'm nervous. But Evan's the matador. Nobody's got his persona on the ice. He's a fantastic athlete."

Weil knows a thing or two about success stories. The walls in the lobby of his Aurora office are filled with autographed pictures of star athletes he has crossed paths with over the years. There's one of Weil with Tracy Austin, another with him and Yannick Noah. There's an autographed poster of Jim Harbaugh, thanking Weil for fixing a foot problem.

And mixed throughout both walls are pictures and newspaper articles of Lysacek, including one from The Sun back when Lysacek was 11. Lysacek signed it, "To Dr. Weil, Thanks for the new feet."

Thirteen years later, Weil is still helping Lysacek with his feet. Lysacek suffered an ankle injury on his left leg that troubled him for a long time. Despite the injury, which was reported as a stress fracture, Lysacek won the world title in March 2009.

The foot was still bothering him in late May when he came to Rockford for an ice show. Weil was there, too, and took a look for himself. Weil said it wasn't a stress fracture, but a "stress reaction." Weil changed Lysacek's orthotics, specially designed inserts for shoes or skates, for the first time since 2000.

"Stress reaction is not a break, but the bone's angry," Weil said. "It could be just as much of a hassle. I sent him a boot so he'd walk around in that for three weeks while we did some testing. We found out it never was a stress fracture. But the point is, yeah, he's healthy."

Still, Lysacek announced Thursday he wasn't going to attempt a quadruple jump in the Olympics over fears of re-injuring the foot.

"My foot is good. I did therapy, and it feels really good," Lysacek said in an Associated Press article. "(But) I can't do many toes. It's a big risk factor for me."

Lysacek is used to taking risks, though. His whole family is, really. Becoming a champion in anything is a huge gamble. Stories abound of overaggressive parents pushing their young children in sports. Weil has seen it happen and often brings it up as a topic on his weekly Sports Doctor Radio Show on WDCB 90.9 FM out of College of DuPage.

Weil had Evan's mother, Tanya Lysacek, on his show, and asked her how they knew they weren't pushing him too hard. She told him of the times when Evan had early morning practices, sometimes as early as 6 a.m. But Tanya said they never had to wake him up. He was always up and ready to go.

Evan came on Weil's show in July and explained what it takes to reach such a high level of competition without burning out.

"For the family, sacrifice and dedication are prerequisites for elite sports," Lysacek said on the show. "It's a difficult decision to make ... from a recreational to an elite sport level. I guess my feeling has always been it has to come from the athlete."

Lysacek surrounds himself with a team of supporters, saying his family is first and foremost. His coaches, choreographers and medical experts are also included. Weil is right there on the team.

"Dr. Weil has been an enormous help with my back and feet -- he has been very supportive," Lysacek said in an e-mail from Vancouver on Saturday.

Lysacek lives in Los Angeles now, and has ever since graduating from Neuqua Valley in 2003. But Naperville remains a large part of him. He returns home at least once a year to visit with family and friends.

Many from that group are in Vancouver now. Weil will be in Naperville, watching as he always does on television. He's optimistic Lysacek will not disappoint.

"If he skates to the top of his ability and everybody else does also, I think he's really got a shot of winning it all," Weil said. "But I'm prejudiced as hell, aren't I? As hell."

## PHOTO GALLERY



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