

**J**apan has achieved great international success in figure skating for both men's and women's singles. By comparison, the couples who represent Japan in pairs and ice dance events sometimes glide under the radar. Two-time Olympic ice dancer Cathy Reed is working to change that, bringing her experience to coaching the next potential champions.

Born in Michigan to a Japanese mother and an American father, Reed began competing in ice dance with her younger brother, Chris. After rising to prominence

by winning the novice division at the 2006 U.S. Championships, the siblings decided to compete for their mother's homeland of Japan at the senior level. They went on to win seven national titles between 2008 and 2015, and represented Japan at two Winter Olympic Games—Vancouver 2010 and Sochi 2014.

For Reed, representing Japan at the Olympic Games was a dream come true.

With family roots in neighboring Saitama Prefecture, Tokyo was a familiar destination for Reed growing up,

HUMAN

## From the Olympics to the Next Generation: Shaping Japan's Future on Ice

**A new cohort of Japanese ice dancers is gaining ground, supported by an experienced Olympian with a mission to advance the sport.**



Reed and her brother Chris perform their free dance in the figure skating team event at the Olympics Winter Games Sochi 2014. Photo: JIJI PRESS



Building on Japan's impressive results in singles skating, Reed hopes to see more opportunities for ice dancers to show off their moves.

and her family visited regularly for skating events. "We did all the touristy things as kids—visiting Sensoji Temple in Asakusa and Tokyo Tower."

### Creating Space for Japan's Ice Dancers

Ice dance itself is unique within figure skating, emphasizing musicality and intricate footwork performed in close hold, akin to ballroom dancing on ice. Most Japanese skaters begin in the singles discipline, taking advantage of a rich competitive environment and ample opportunities to compete. By contrast, dance and pairs are less developed: fewer couples mean fewer competitions, along with limited training environments not suited to working with a partner.

Reed is currently based at the Kinoshita Academy Kyoto Ice Arena in Uji, Kyoto Prefecture. The Kinoshita Academy has a dedicated figure skating program not only for singles but also for ice dance and pairs. In Japan, as she points out, securing ice time for ice dance teams to practice can often be difficult amid the popularity of singles skating and limited number of ice rinks.

In light of these challenges, there was welcome news in September for Japan's skating community with the opening of the Tokyo Tatsumi Ice Arena, which has an Olympic-sized rink in Koto City. The first year-round ice-skating facility operated by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, the new arena makes use of the existing infrastructure of the former Tokyo Tatsumi International Swimming Center.

### Continuing a Legacy Through Coaching

For Reed, coaching has been both a way to give back and to carry forward the dreams she shared with her brother Chris, who passed away suddenly from cardiac arrest in 2020. "Losing my brother was so hard because I thought we could work together to promote ice dancing here. But I made a promise to him that I would do this regardless," she says. "Seeing the skaters love what they do out there is the most rewarding feeling—watching them enjoy their successes, learn from their failures and make this journey their own."

Some of her inspiration comes from outside the rink. Reed often spends time in Tokyo attending stage shows, ballet and kabuki performances. "Tokyo is where you're going to get the most international dance and theater," she notes, adding that these performances help enrich the choreography for her students and broaden her artistic perspective.

Japan's skaters will take to the ice in February at the 2026 Winter Olympics, officially known as Milano Cortina 2026 and jointly hosted by Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo. Reed is also anticipating the performance of her younger sister, Allison, who will compete in ice dance for Lithuania alongside her partner, Saulius Ambrulevičius.

Looking ahead, Reed stresses the importance of giving Japanese ice dancers more international exposure and opportunities to compete. "The judges need to see them, and people need to know that Japan has great ice dance teams. They need those opportunities to grow, to keep skating together and to keep improving at the same time."



Reed at the rink with a young pair of ice dancers.