

## Wonders

PHOTOS: Check out what the Maple Grove Wonders of Winter event had to offer those in attendance.

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(PHOTO COURTESY OF KARRI FABER)

Brock Faber is pictured during a University of Minnesota hockey game. The Maple Grove native will be one of four teenagers to take the ice for Team USA in the Olympics, the first under-20-year-olds since 1992.

## Maple Grove's Faber competes with U.S. men's hockey team

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All Brock Faber wanted was his pre-game nap. Faber and his teammates on the United States National Junior Hockey Team were preparing to face Sweden in late December in the World Junior Champion-

ship in Red Deer, Alberta, but the Maple Grove native's phone kept buzzing.

Finally, Faber looked at his buzzing phone. It was team Zoom call with John Vanbiesbrouck, general manager of the U.S. National Junior team, who told them that due to rising COVID-19 cases, the tour-

nament was canceled. One earlier, the U.S. National Junior Team, including Faber, beat Canada to win the gold medal in the same tournament, which Faber said is the top athletic moment of his 19-year life. The chance to defend their championship was gone.

After sharing the news

that the tournament was canceled, Vanbiesbrouck pulled Faber and two teammates aside. Just one week prior, the National Hockey League announced that professional players would not participate in the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing.

"When we found out

that NHL players couldn't go to the Olympics, a thought was in the back of my head for sure," Faber said.

Filled with disappointment after hearing their international tournament was nixed, Faber and those two other players learned they were invited to play

for the United States at the upcoming Olympics.

"It was kind of a crazy day," said Faber, who is one of seven Minnesotans and three University of Minnesota Golden Gophers named to the Olympic roster.

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The city launches website to inform residents about future community center project.

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## Faber

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### Crimson roots

No matter where Faber's hockey journey takes him – from the University of Minnesota, his current collegiate team, to Beijing, China – he never forgets his roots in Maple Grove.

“Hockey is a pretty big sport in Maple Grove,” he said. “I am so grateful for all the amazing coaches who took time out of their nights to run practices and coach us kids. [Maple Grove] is a special place.”

In the Osseo Maple Grove Hockey Association, Faber played on youth teams from mites to bantam.

“Brock had such a great network of coaches from day one. They were instrumental in doing what they did,” Jay said.

From the time Faber was 5 years old until 13, Curtis Janicke got an up-close and personal view of the hockey prodigy as he served as the mite director and coached Faber through peewees.

It didn't take long for Janicke to realize that Faber had natural talents for hockey, football, baseball, or basically any sport he played.

“Brock is a naturally gifted athlete,” he said. “And he has innate mental skills to go with it. He has the awareness and patience to process everything so easily. His hockey IQ is off the charts.”

Some players who have those physical gifts, how-

ever, act with an arrogance that lets everyone know they are something special. Faber didn't do that.

“He has always been a humble, high-quality kid,” Janicke said. “As talented an athlete as he was, Brock could score five goals and you wouldn't know it. He would rather assist than score goals.”

After typically playing as a forward, in his first year of bantam Faber transferred those offensive skills to a defensive role. That is also the time when Faber first grasped that he had the chance to get really good at the sport he loved.

“That's when I started taking it more seriously ... that this game could lead me to my dreams,” he said.

According to his mom, coaches thought that to develop Faber's defensive side, where he showed natural skill, he should play all positions. “His coaches always knew he would be a defenseman,” she said.

“The best players that go to the next level at defense, they often played years of offense younger,” Janicke said. “It develops them in a different way. The game slows down on defense after being on offense. But it takes a rare athlete to do it at a level Brock is doing. His skating ability is remarkable. His backward skating ability is almost as good as most people's forward skating ability.”

### Going where the puck takes him

As much as Faber loved



(PHOTO COURTESY OF BROCK FABER)

Brock Faber, currently a sophomore, plays college hockey for the University of Minnesota and was selected in the second round of the 2020 NHL Draft by the Los Angeles Kings.

hockey, he also tried out several other sports. Football, basketball, soccer, baseball and lacrosse – if there was anything with a ball and competition, you would probably find Faber.

His mom thought Brock stood out more in football as a running back than hockey as a kid.

“I remembered thinking, gosh he's really good at football,” Karri said.

But hockey eventually rose to the top for Faber, and when he was a sophomore he tried out for the U.S. National Team

Development Program in Plymouth, Michigan. After a rigorous tryout process, Faber made the cut and was invited to live in Michigan to focus on hockey. “Hockey was his passion and he pursued it,” Jay said.

Faber, currently a 6-foot, 1-inch, 200-pound defenseman, moved to Michigan in his sophomore year of high school, where he went to school from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m., followed by an afternoon at the rink for practice and weight training. He was home by 6 p.m., worked on his homework, and then off to bed. Rinse, repeat.

Even though he was hundreds of miles from home, Faber found comfort in playing the sport he loved. “As long as he was at the rink, he was at home,” his dad said.

### Family bonds run deep

Growing up, Faber was the youngest of three kids. His oldest sister, Payton, played travel soccer, and his middle sister, Paige, who was born with a cognitive disability, deeply loved hockey.

Faber first started skating in the backyard when he was 5 years old.

Even though the Fabers didn't have a flat backyard, Jay found a way to build a skating rink. “The hours of work to get enjoyment was worth it,” he said.

Every day during the winter, Brock and Paige, like clockwork, would come home from school and then immediately start skating together.

“We were always out there. That really formed our relationship to be as special as it is,” Faber said.

If they weren't outside skating, then odds are they were shooting pucks in the basement, tied at the hip with the love of hockey.

During her time in Maple Grove adapted athletics, Paige scored over 100 career goals in both floor hockey and soccer, while competing in softball as well.

“She has helped me to be thankful for every opportunity I have,” Faber said. “Growing up with her, I understand how lucky I am to play this game at such a high level and have the opportunity to play in the Olympics.”

He continued, “She knows how much this game means to me and I know how much this game means to her too, which is a pretty special bond that makes it seem unbreakable.”

### On to Beijing

Beijing will be the biggest stage Faber has played on. While pressure has the potential to seep in, he is focused on staying excited, and not nervous, about the opportunity.

“I've been able to represent this country a lot playing hockey, but there is nothing that tops the Olympics,” he said. “I don't think there is anything that can prepare you for a stage like that. But it's more excitement for me [than pressure]. Being able to play the game I love and represent this country on a stage like that ... I'm very thankful to be in this position and really excited to get going.”

Selected in the second round of the 2020 NHL Draft by the Los Angeles Kings, Faber didn't think he would be playing in the Olympics before becoming a professional. “Since I was a little mini-mite, my number one goal was to play in the NHL and win a Stanley Cup,” he said. “The Olympics is sort of like a bonus.”

The U.S. Men's National Team begins Olympic play Thursday, Feb. 10, at 7:10 a.m. CT against China. At some point during the tournament, the Fabers are planning to have close family friends from youth hockey, like the Janickes, over to watch Faber and the Americans take the ice.

“He sacrificed a lot for all the work he's put in,” Jay said.

His mom said it is an honor to see him go to the Olympics.

“We're excited for him and proud of him.”



(PHOTO COURTESY OF KARRI FABER)

Maple Grove's Brock Faber and friends play hockey on the Faber's backyard rink, built by his dad, Jay Faber.