

IN

An IN Community Magazine

Mt. Lebanon

SILVER LINING

FROM MT. LEBANON ICE CENTER
TO THE WINTER OLYMPICS,
JOHN-HENRY KRUEGER
BRINGS HOME THE SILVER!



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Silver Lining

From the Mt. Lebanon Ice Center to the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics, John-Henry Krueger brings home the silver medal in speedskating.

BY JENNIFER BROZAK



John-Henry Krueger qualified for the 2018 U.S. Olympic Team after winning the men's 500m, 1000m, 1500m and overall title at the U.S. Olympic Team Trials.

As the son of a professional figure skating coach, John-Henry Krueger was no stranger to the ice rink. His mother, Heidi Krueger, taught him and his older brother Cole to skate at the Mt. Lebanon Ice Center when they were still very young. It wasn't long before they were literally skating circles around her, racing each other to see who could go the fastest.

Neither son showed an interest in figure skating or hockey. Cole's speed, however, soon caught the eye of a coach from the Pittsburgh Speedskating Club.

"Cole was skating at a public session, when a coach approached him and asked if he'd ever thought of speedskating," says Heidi, a 1981 Mt. Lebanon High School graduate. "He tried it, fell in love with it, and then shortly after, John-Henry joined him. He wanted to be like his big brother."

The club quickly realized that the brothers had a unique talent on the ice.

A short-track speedskater, John-Henry soon outgrew Pittsburgh's speedskating scene. He began training in Washington, D.C., with his family making the commute back and forth from Peters Township several times a week. John-Henry then traveled to South Korea to train, and eventually to the Netherlands, where he currently resides.

During competition season, he typically trains six days a week, six to eight hours a day.

Cole is also living and training overseas and competing at the elite level, currently racing for the Hungarian team.

On his way to the Olympics, John-Henry fought his way to the top of the pack, eventually becoming one of the sport's best athletes. He nearly competed at the 2014 Olympics but, in a heartbreaking twist of events, became ill with the swine flu and was unable to compete.

"It was devastating," says Heidi. "John-Henry was one of the top speedskaters in the world, and he couldn't compete. It was a bitter pill to swallow.

"But, we're Christians," she adds, "and we believe everything happens for a reason."

Four years later, at age 22, John-Henry would finally get to experience Olympic competition at the 2018 Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea. And he would return to his hometown with a silver medal

in the 1,000-meter short-track—the first American man to win a silver medal in that event since Apolo Ohno in 2010.

John-Henry found himself in medal position throughout the race, firmly cementing that position after a wild crash took out half of the pack. "Before the fall happened, I was in a good position. I knew I was going to get a medal," he says. "The fall guaranteed it."

As one can imagine, winning a medal at the Olympics is a surreal experience.

"I experienced the full spectrum of emotions a person can have. But I was more nervous about getting on the podium than I was before the race," he says with a laugh. "The ice is familiar for me. Standing on a podium in front of a large group of people was not."

John-Henry's parents, who accompanied him to South Korea for the Olympic Games, also felt a wide swath of emotions after the win.

"Watching my son put that medal around his neck... I just can't put it into words," says Heidi. "At the medals ceremony, you're standing in this pen with all of these other parents who might not speak the same language, but who are all feeling what you're feeling. You're all just so grateful that all of your child's hard work has paid off. You just experience such joy that your child has done what he's set out to do."

Two days after the Olympics, John-Henry was back on a plane to the Netherlands and then on to Montreal in March, where he competed at the International Skating Union World Championships. He ranked 17th overall.

After a much-needed break this spring, John-Henry will determine his future in terms of training and competition. Many of those decisions, he explains, will be based on assessments made by US Speedskating.



PHOTO BY AUSTIN CONTROULIS

John-Henry Krueger won the United States' first individual speedskating medal since 2010.

For someone who likes to go fast, slowing down can be challenging. "All I can do is relax and wait to see what happens. Overall, I had a great year with the Dutch team," he says. "It wouldn't be terrible to return to the Netherlands."

John-Henry adds that the support he's received from his hometown has been overwhelming. "Pittsburgh is a loyal sports town, and it's been great to see how much the city came together to support me and to recognize my sport." As of press time, he was scheduled to appear at meet-and-greets around the area.

Unlike hockey and football, short-track speedskating isn't a popular sport in the 'Burgh—or in the country, for that matter—but John-Henry actually enjoys the below-the-radar aspect of it. "It's a relatively new sport. It's still in its infancy, and watching it grow, evolve and change has been exciting," he says. "I may be biased, but I think that short-track speedskating is an underrated but incredibly interesting sport." ■



PHOTO BY PRIMETIME SHOTS

On March 22 at a Peters Township Library celebration, trustees for the Washington County Community Foundation (WCCF) announced they will be providing a \$2,500 grant to the Washington County charity of John-Henry's choice in his honor.

Pictured L to R: Edward C. Morascyzk, Chairman, Dorothy F. Tecklenburg, John-Henry Krueger, Tammy L. Hardy and Thomas F. Hoffman.