

A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

Hamilton celebrates 40 years of going for gold

BY LYNN RUTHERFORD

As Scott Hamilton stood atop the 1984 Olympic podium, waving to the crowd in Sarajevo's Zetra Olympic Hall, he turned to his right and told Brian Orser, "I can't believe it's over."

Hamilton was only partly right. His quest for Olympic gold had ended, but he used his medal as a springboard to create much more: Stars on Ice, a professional skating tour emphasizing sophisticated choreography and performance; a commentary career that spanned decades; and the Scott Hamilton CARES Foundation, established as a national entity in 2014 to fund cancer research.

"We are assembled here tonight for a whole bunch of reasons, but ultimately, to use our gifts for the greater good," Hamilton told attendees at 40 Years of Going for Gold, an event hosted by his CARES Foundation to mark the 40th anniversary of the Sarajevo podium, held at Glide at Brooklyn Bridge Park in New York City on Feb. 16.

The four-time World champion is only too familiar with the disease. His mother, Dorothy, died of melanoma in 1977 at age 48. Hamilton himself was diagnosed with testicular cancer in 1997 and made a successful return to skating after a grueling series of treatments, including chemo and surgery. In 2004, he had a benign brain tumor treated at the Cleveland Clinic; it reemerged in 2010, requiring surgery. In 2016, Hamilton



The 1984 Olympic men's podium was reunited recently. (l-r) Brian Orser of Canada, silver; Scott Hamilton, USA, gold; and Jozef Sabovcik of the former Czechoslovakia, bronze.

announced he had received his third brain tumor diagnosis. He is thus far asymptomatic and has elected to avoid additional surgery.

"The survival rate is primarily (due) to two things, early detection — so important — and research," he said. "My mom didn't have a chance. Very few of you knew my mom, but if you would've known my mom,

you would've loved her. She was an amazing woman and she never had a chance. They threw everything they could at her for two years and she finally succumbed."

The evening, a fundraiser for CARES, included an ice show emceed by Hamilton, with performances by 2022 U.S. champion Mariah Bell; 2023 NHK Trophy silver medalist Lindsay Thorngren; the Ice Theatre of New York; and a young skater from Hamilton's home city of Nashville, Tennessee, Jaxon Surbrook.

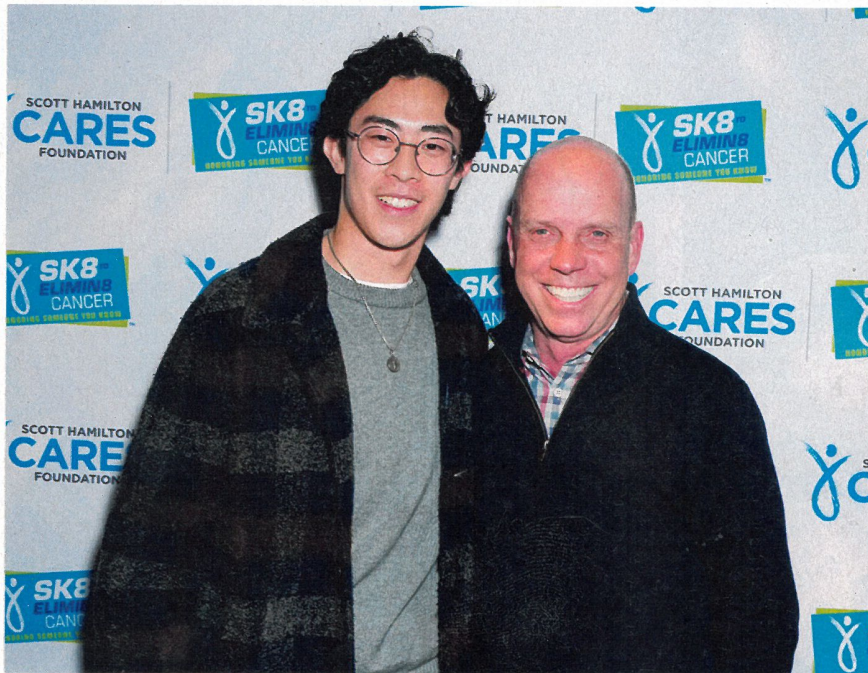
"It was awesome skating under the Brooklyn Bridge and just having the New York skyline in the background," Surbrook, 14, said, adding, "Scott has really just kept pushing through everything that's been thrown at him. I think that's a very good lesson to learn."

Surbrook has raised more than \$40,000 for CARES since 2017, gaining donations from local businesses and selling homemade dog treats. His family's experiences with cancer inspired him to join Hamilton's crusade: two of his grandparents died of leukemia, and a third is a cancer survivor.

"My grandpa actually lived longer (due to research) and then my other grandpa was cured due to research that money has gone to," he said.

Hamilton and fellow Sarajevo medalists Orser, who won silver for Canada, and Jozef Sabovcik, the bronze medalist from the former Czechoslovakia, were joined by 2022 Olympic champion Nathan Chen and Hall of Fame sports broadcaster Andrea Joyce for a panel discussion.

2022 Olympic champion Nathan Chen and his mentor Scott Hamilton enjoy the festivities.



PHOTOS BY JOHN NACON/GETTY IMAGES

"I have way too many memories, and a few lack thereof, with these two guys," Hamilton said of Orser and Sabovcik. "There is nobody I would rather spend a day like today with. It was just really fun to be back together. It's the first time we've been in the same place in 20 years."

The trio's kinship was born in a pub in Garmisch, Germany, in 1983. Winding down after a post-Worlds ISU tour in Europe, Hamilton said to his companions, "Wouldn't it be great if it were us on the podium next year?" and the three offered a silent toast to the idea.

"We spent way more time off the ice together than we ever did in competition," Hamilton said.

Some 35 years separate Hamilton's introduction to the sport at Bowling Green State University's rink and the day in 2002 when Chen first took the ice in Salt Lake City, but the figure skating community is small, its laces bound together through ripples in time.

"The impact that Scott Hamilton has had on figure skating, you can't even explain it," Chen said. "It's awesome to be here. The work that he's been doing with CARES, leveraging both biomedical research and skating and using his platform to do so much

good, is very admirable."

Orser and Sabovcik, too, have touched Chen's career. Orser coached his greatest rival, Yuzuru Hanyu, to two Olympic gold medals, while Sabovcik gave him jump lessons early in his career.

"I worked with Jozef for a really long time," Chen said. "All of my technique comes straight from him."

Hamilton has been a mentor to the younger skater over the years. He recalled a night at a Scott Hamilton and Friends show in Nashville in 2018, not long after Chen had won his first World title.

"I asked, 'World champion — how's that feel? And (Chen) is like, 'It's a little bit different. It's interesting,'" Hamilton said. "And I go, 'You know what I learned (after) my second World title? We're all competing against guys just like (us). We're all knuckleheads just trying to figure it out. You're not competing against every sentient (being) in the world, or the history thereof; you're just trying to win a competition.' And I hope that served Nathan in some way, shape or form, because he crushed it."

Chen acknowledged how the 1984 Olympic champion held audiences in his thrall for more than 20 years.

"Definitely, he has been a role model for

forever, (with) his stage presence and how he was able to just basically command a crowd," Chen said. "And even today, as he stepped on the ice, even though he's not skating here, people were like, 'Oh, we want to see what's going on.'"

Skating is not the only tie that binds the two Olympic champions. Chen, who graduates from Yale University in May, plans to pursue a medical career.

"I'll be heading into a program next year, sort of a pre-med boot camp, basically, in Baltimore," he said. "I'll be doing a post-bac program at Goucher College, so I'll be there for the next year. And then from there, we'll see what the future has for me."

Hamilton, who took the occasion to announce that a three-year research project in melanoma funded by CARES was moving to clinical trials, ended the evening filled with hope.

"You're a person of profound excellence," he said to Chen. "You are just a good person who wants to do good things. I know that if you go into oncology, you're going to change it forever. I just know that."

To learn more about the Scott Hamilton CARES Foundation and support their cancer research initiatives, visit www.ScottCARES.org

Hamilton has some with Ice Theatre of New York performers Sarah France, Karina Manta, and Libby McGrosky.

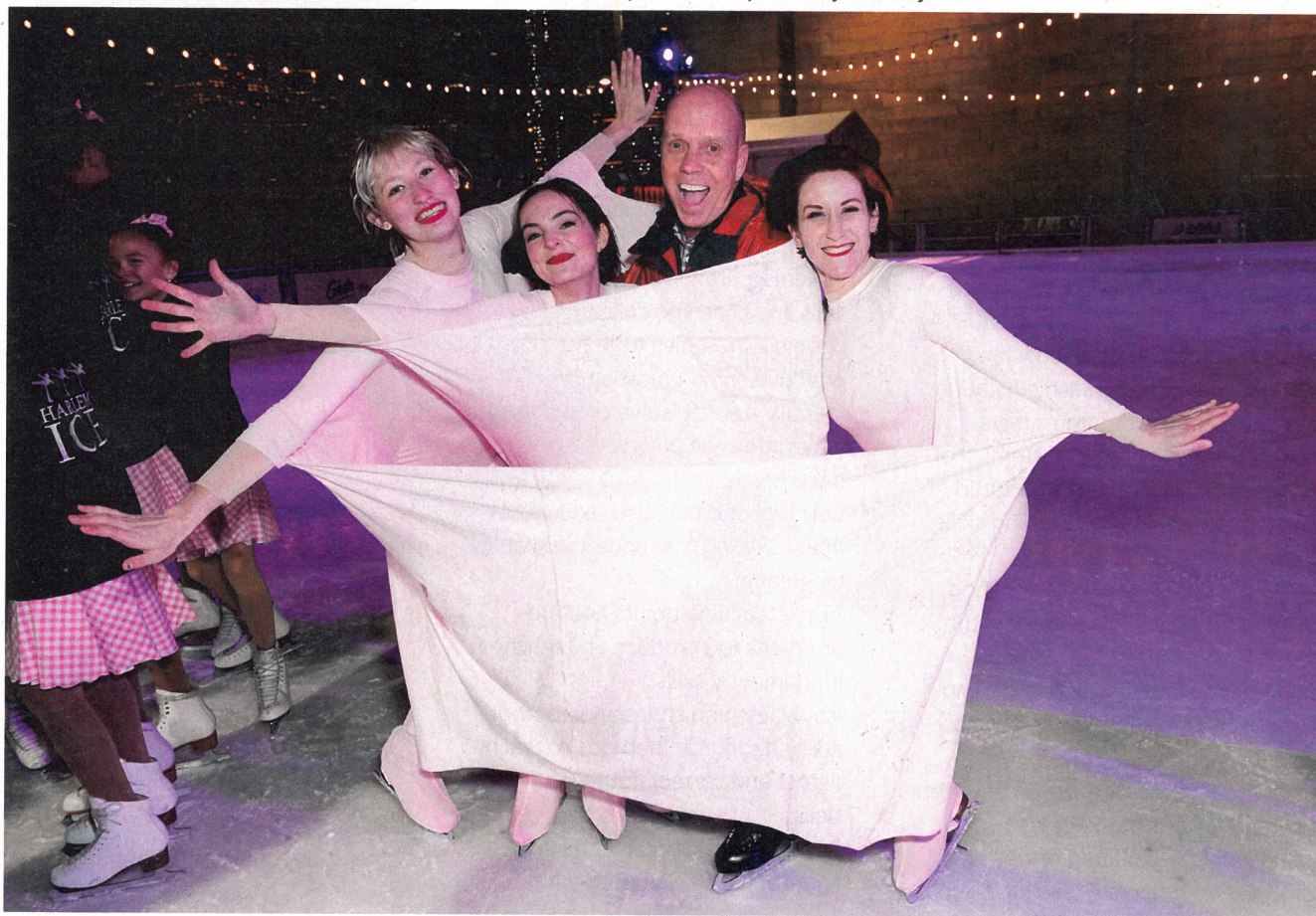


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