



TRAILBLAZING MAAME BINEY IS FINDING HER WAY IN AN UNPRECEDENTED 2020

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The path to speedskating started with a sign on the side of the road. Maame Biney was 5 years old when she and her dad were driving around Virginia and saw a sign that read: “Learn to skate.” He asked her if she wanted to try figure skating. Her response?

“Yeah, sure. Why not?” Biney recalled.

Figure skating lasted only six months for Biney before her coach told her dad she was too fast and should try speedskating instead.



Short track speedskating eventually took her around the world to world cups, the world championships and the 2018 Olympics. She's found plenty of success, too, winning the 500-meter at the 2018 U.S. Olympic Team Trials and claiming back-to-back junior world titles in the event in 2018 and '19.

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And still just 20 years old, Biney's story is only just beginning — both on and off the ice.

Born in Ghana, Biney moved to the Washington D.C. area around age 5. Most people learned about her 12 years later, in 2018, when the high school senior became the first Black woman to qualify for a U.S. Olympic speedskating team.

It was a historic milestone, and Biney is optimistic that her accomplishment was only the beginning. She remembers skating with other Black athletes growing up but recalls they didn't have the push or foundation to get to the next level that Biney reached. She's hopeful her example can help change that, both by inspiring more Black athletes to try the sport but also by helping US Speedskating make the sport more accessible in Black communities.

She sees a lot of potential to grow the sport even more.

"I hope that as much as I didn't feel any different with my teammates and everyone around me, I just hope that it becomes more of a thing and more Black people and more Black skaters are able to join," Biney said.

One way she's helping spread awareness is by sharing more of her own experience, including off the ice. This summer, for example, she posted statements on her Instagram in support of Black Lives Matter following the killing of George Floyd.

"I just felt like I needed to say something so that people understood that it hurt me, and it hurt my dad, and it hurt people around me who were Black," Biney said. "And even people who weren't Black."



Whether someone has three or 3 million followers, using platforms to share your opinions is so important, Biney said, adding that she received supportive feedback from her followers after her posts.

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“I just think using your voices as loud as you can is very, very important,” Biney said.

In a year that’s played out unlike anyone expected, Biney is finding her way. Although the last speed skating season ended abruptly because of COVID-19 and the current season is delayed, training is still a major focus. She’s also focusing on her studies at the University of Utah. For a short time, she thought about a career in chemical engineering but switched her major to information systems. She’s taking online classes and hopes to know soon what career path might lie ahead.

Still, even with training and school Biney has found some unexpected free time in 2020.

She took up rock climbing three or four times a week at her university facilities. It was a different type of challenge for her, she said.

“Because for skating, we use mainly our legs,” Biney said. “We use our arms but not as much as our legs.”

Her arms may have been a little sore, but she loved her new hobby because it was so much fun.

For a non-exercise-related pastime, Biney likes to paint. The activity is calming and relaxing for her, as she paints and also watches a TV show.

Those hobbies haven’t replaced her competitive spirit, however. The lack of competitions has been tough for Biney, who said she loves racing to see how she stacks up against her competitors. Instead she’s training in Utah, focusing on



getting faster with her skating and on technical things like improving her corner entrances. She hopes this time with the competition will actually be a boon for her skating. (1)

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As the speedskating season, like the rest of the world, is still uncertain in the middle of a pandemic, Biney knows one thing for certain: she’s all-in on a return to the Olympic team.

In 2018, she was ecstatic to make the Olympic team, but she wasn’t expecting to make a return trip to the next Olympic Games in Beijing. She was focused on finishing high school and “wanted to go live my college life.” It wasn’t until after the 2018 Olympics that Biney knew she wanted to come back in 2022.

She’d like to get on the podium this time.

“So yeah, my sights are definitely very much still on Beijing,” Biney said. “It’s just, I feel like now it’s a little rocky, obviously, because of COVID.”

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