

# Sierra-at-Tahoe athletes bring Olympics home



Jamie Anderson and Hannah Teter celebrate their accomplishments at Sierra-at-Tahoe on April 7. Photo/Kathryn Reed

**By Susan Wood**

TWIN BRIDGES – Sharing their Olympic experience in full circle, medalists Jamie Anderson and Hannah Teter came home to Sierra-at-Tahoe Saturday to celebrate with about 500 friends, families and fans.

The Winter Games in South Korea are but a distant memory, but etched in the hearts and minds of those of all ages who turned out was the community spirit that spawned these extraordinary athletes.



Jamie Anderson signs a helmet, one of many personal items people brought to be autographed. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Anderson and Teter have won gold medals in different Winter Games, celebrating in grand style **four years ago** when they arrived at the Sierra plaza in a vintage fire truck with a parade of dignitaries. This year's event was smaller in blustery weather, but no less enthusiastic.

In viewing the autograph line set up at the Solstice, it was hard to know who was more excited about meeting these women who call Sierra their home resort – the kids or the adults.



***Sierra-at-Tahoe General Manager John Rice's philosophy of making the resort a family helps foster the development of Olympic-caliber athletes.***

Mercedes Rodrigues of San Mateo could hardly contain herself.

"I was shaking," she said, describing the moment she walked up to Anderson and Teter to have them sign posters. She was smiling from ear to ear as her 10-year-old son, Cameron, was quite relaxed. The family watches Olympic sports as diligently as they bring their season passes to ski at Sierra.

"I want to try to win everything," she said, peering over the signed memorabilia in the silent auction.



Nolan and Maia Vo are fans of Hannah Teter's. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Before and after Anderson and Teter appeared before a swarm of cameras, South Lake Tahoe Mayor Wendy David and Sierra-at-Tahoe General Manager John Rice gave personal accounts of what the experience means to them.

Nods were given to other Sierra homespun athletes, Maddie Bowman and Kyle Smaine, who couldn't make it since they're in Mammoth and Russia, respectively. On occasion, fans, Teter and Anderson would hold up giant "fathead" cutouts of them to remind all just how large the Sierra family is.

David told the crowd how proud she is of these homegrown athletes, characterizing the experience as a "unique and treasured opportunity."

Then, she proceeded to mention her humbling experience at Sierra-at-Tahoe years ago.

"Like many of you, many of my memories center around Sierra-at-Tahoe. My first time on skis was here on this mountain. I was terrible and had to be guided off the mountain by the ski patrol down Sugar and Spice before darkness hit," she said of the green run that winds around from the summit to the base

lodge. “It is here that I blew out my ACL (knee ligament), came down off the mountain on a sled, only to be greeted by a ski school class of preschoolers, most of whom I was teaching.”



South Lake Tahoe Mayor Wendy David and Sierra General Manager John Rice celebrate the athletes' success. Photo/Kathryn Reed

David taught Bowman, who seized the opportunity to get in on the 4.0 GPA program Sierra established years ago. The program awards a Sierra season pass to Lake Tahoe Unified School District students who receive straight A's. Hundreds of South Shore youth have taken advantage of the program. As a former LTUSD trustee, David told *Lake Tahoe News* she credits that program with providing students like Bowman valuable time on the slopes honing their craft.

Rice was no less personal in addressing his pride directed at these athletes who train on his turf.

“I'm very humbled and honored to be here,” Rice told the attentive crowd. He attributes much of **the resort's success** in

cultivating these winners to not only the programs but the parents, coaches, community and the sheer fun of the mountain's culture.



Cut outs of Maddie Bowman and Kyle Smaine are reminders of Sierra's depth in high-level competitors. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The Sierra Olympic quest all started with Travis Cabral, now a South Lake Tahoe police officer serving his community in other ways.

Rice recalled how Cabral – in pure, no-frills Sierra style – said all he needed to succeed were a season pass, shovel and locker, and he was set.

When Bowman, Anderson and Teter entered the scene, Rice thought: "These girls are crushing it."

With a few giggles from the crowd, Rice talked about how a younger Anderson was motivated by Starburst candy she knew he often had in his office. She also knew to go to him with her French fry craving and for a ride.

"Jamie, she's in a different class, a different league now," he said, having cultivated "this small town girl" with a

unique talent into a renowned sensation worthy of celebrity status.

A younger Teter showed up from Vermont and also humbly asked Rice for a pass in order to train to make the U.S. Olympic Ski Team. Then she won a gold medal in Italy over a decade ago.

“I asked her if she wanted two passes (after that),” Rice said to audience laughter. “We’ve kept her on because she’s so much a part of our brand.”

Indeed, she is. Teter took a moment to tell *Lake Tahoe News* she plans to split her snowboarding time next season between a few competitions and a lot of “soul riding” – illustrating just how mentally spiritual the sport can be. She calls moving to Tahoe “one of the best decisions she’s ever made in her life.” Teter’s eyes lit up when she declared she’d like to compete in Beijing for the next Winter Games in 2022.

“I feel like I still have the gusto. I just have to mix it up,” she said about trying new things. In the meantime, her charitable work and maple syrup operation get her attention still.

Her comrade, Anderson, was no less genuine – proudly wearing the honor of being a Meyers resident where she was home-schooled and “Sierra was my day care.”

The crowd whooped it up.

Anderson, the first female snowboarder to win more than one Olympic gold medal, later told *Lake Tahoe News* this most recent gold medal performance was “even sweeter” than the first in Russia because it was won “under enormous pressure.”



Jamie Anderson's medals from the 2018 Winter Games. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The 28-year-old snowboarder won gold in the inaugural women's slopestyle event in 2014 in Sochi, then made a repeat performance at the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang a few months ago. She also took home silver this year in the first big air competition – an event with a launching ramp of 160 feet.

Teter, 31, won the gold medal in halfpipe at the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino and silver at the 2010 Games in Vancouver. She placed fourth in Sochi. She missed making the 2018 team by one spot.

Both women were handed a special basket provided by the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority and a bouquet of flowers to go with the adoration.

"I think these athletes have really turned the world's eyes on us (in Tahoe). It just shows what kind of athlete we produce in this environment," LTVA Executive Director Carol Chaplin told *LTN*.

Who's next? Perhaps it will be 7-year-old Nolan Vo or 10-year-old Maia Vo of Orinda – who drove up to stand in line at their home resort to meet Anderson and Teter with their parents, Long and Mimi.



Or could it be a very shy but intense-looking Taylor Sheldon, 6, of El Dorado Hills?

“She’s been so excited about this all week,” her mother, Melissa Sheldon, said.

Anderson had a special message for all the kids: “Just find something you really love, look out for each other and never give up on your dream.”