

Sports

HOW TWO TEEN BROTHERS BECAME THE WORLD

TETRIS CHAMPS

BY ZACH SCHONBRUN



Michael Artiaga, 14, left, has won the Classic Tetris World Championship twice, in 2020 and 2021. His brother Andy, 16, took third place two years ago and second last year.

WHEN MICHAEL ARTIAGA pulls up Tetris on his classic Nintendo console and starts streaming on Twitch, thousands of viewers pop in to watch him play. He's not just good at the classic puzzle game — he's the best. The 14-year-old, known by his username, Dog, beat out dozens of adults to win the Classic Tetris World Championship in 2020 and 2021. But his biggest competitor was just outside his bedroom door: his 16-year-old brother, Andy, took third place in 2021 and came in second in 2020.

Invented in the 1980s, Tetris seems simple at first glance: Different shapes fall from the top of the screen, and players have to move and rotate them to fit together. Once they form a line, they disappear and the player gets

points. If they stack up too high, the player loses. It seems simple, but the game is really hard. "There's a lot of quick thinking," Michael says.

Michael and Andy, who live in Fort Worth, started playing as kids on their dad's old Game Boy. They didn't get really into it until 2018, after a 16-year-old named Joseph Saelee unexpectedly beat out a bunch of adults to become the world champion. "There were no young players in the Tetris scene before Joseph," Michael says. "He was a new thing."

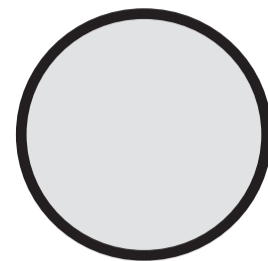
Inspired, the brothers started practicing. They put separate consoles in their rooms and would shout their scores out to each other. When they lost, they would talk over what went wrong. They studied techniques on YouTube, figuring out which styles worked best for them. "It took a

decent while before we got good," Michael says. "It wasn't just overnight." Their parents only let them practice about an hour a day, but over time, they got better and better.

In 2020, the two qualified for the championships and made it to the finals against each other before Michael ultimately won. They duked it out again in 2021, in the semifinals, where Michael beat his brother and went on to get first place again. Their parents watched on Twitch from the living room, not wanting to play favorites. After he was beaten, Andy gave his brother a high five. "We definitely wanted the finals to be us two," Michael says. "Because we both get great trophies." If they keep playing as well as they have, they might just get a shot at going head-to-head again in 2022. In the meantime, they'll be just down the hall. ♦

HOW I BECAME A

SLED HOCKEY PLAYER



BY BRODY ROYBAL

I WAS BORN without legs, but my parents wanted me to live the most normal life possible. They pushed me to try new things. So I played T-ball, soccer, track and other sports using a wheelchair, but couldn't really keep up.

I started playing sled hockey when I was 8, and I fell in love with it almost immediately. It's not played in a wheelchair. Instead we zip around the ice on sleds. We use two sticks, both to skate and to shoot and pass the puck. Cruising around the rink and knocking into other players felt like an escape from my everyday life.

It soon became a passion. I watched the national men's sled hockey team and thought, That's what I want to do. When I was 12, I dominated the youth games and tournaments, so I started playing on the local men's team, with men between 20 and 50 years old. It was a crazy experience, but it pushed me.

In 2014, when I was 15, I became the youngest player to ever compete on the U.S. Paralympic sled hockey team. It felt surreal. I went from being a normal high-school kid to flying to Russia and competing on a world stage. I looked up at the stands and soaked it all in.

As players, we're always trying new ways to pick up the puck or shoot, working on tiny details that no one notices but that make the biggest difference on the ice. Because the sport is relatively new, we're always experimenting.

Now I'm headed to my third Paralympics, in Beijing. I'm looking forward to it. For us, there's a lot of practice, but we usually get to play only a couple games per year. The games let us test everything we've worked so hard for. If we win gold, it will be our fourth in a row — a record-breaking winning streak. *Interview by Lorraine Allen*

A GIRL BASEBALL PLAYER

STEPS UP TO THE PLATE

BY DAVID WALDSTEIN · PHOTOGRAPH BY TK



Genevieve Beacom, 17, in January became the first girl ever to play professional baseball in her native Australia.

IT WOULD BE a huge deal for any 17-year-old to play in a professional baseball game. But for Genevieve Beacom, her day playing in the pros was history-making: On Jan. 7, she became the first girl ever to play in the Australian Baseball League, one of the world's top professional leagues.

Fans at the Melbourne Aces game stood and cheered as Genevieve made her way onto the field. The 6-foot-2, left-handed pitcher was called in to pitch one inning against the Adelaide Giants. Nobody scored any hits or runs against her. "She proved she belonged," says Peter Moy-

lan, the manager of the Aces and a former Major League Baseball pitcher. "It was a fantastic night."

Genevieve is used to playing with boys: She has been doing it since she started T-ball at age 5. While most girls in Australia (and the United States) are encouraged to play softball over baseball, Genevieve fell in love with baseball after her brother played. She joined Little League and became known in her area as an incredibly talented pitcher with a great curveball — and was eventually able to throw the ball 84 miles an hour.

"They understand I have a feel for the game and that I actually can compete with them," Genevieve says of the boys she plays with. She only remembers one time when her gender became an issue — when she was 11, a boy cried about having to go up against her. She struck him out shortly after, and continued to wow teammates, coaches and fans.

Last year, the Aces invited Genevieve to pitch for their junior development program for promising young players. Then, in late December, Moylan saw her practice and signed her to the senior team. "I

was astonished," Genevieve says. When she was called to pitch in that first game in January, she initially felt nervous. But then "once I threw that first pitch, it was just like normal baseball for me."

She'll continue pitching with the Aces for the rest of the season, and then hopes to play college baseball in the United States in the fall. Her ultimate dream is to make it to the major leagues. "Wherever the game can take me," she says, "I'm just happy to be on the journey." No matter what happens, she has already made a pitch for baseball history. ♦

TINY STORY

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The number of athletes who can compete in this year's Paralympic Games, the international competition for athletes with physical disabilities or who are blind or partly blind. The games will take place in Beijing, in the same venues as the Winter Olympics, and will run from March 4 to 13. They feature sports including skiing, snowboarding, sled hockey and wheelchair curling.