



China's Gu Ailing in action while (right) moments after Tess Ledeux finished her competition, Gu went to console the silver medalist from France, who lost her father in January. — Xinhua

Reasons behind Gu's run of success

California-born Gu Ailing won gold for China at the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games on Tuesday, earning victory in the inaugural women's freeski Big Air with a stunning jump she had never tried before.

After a strong opening jump, the 18-year-old saved her best for last by landing a left double-cork 1620 — four and a half rotations in the air — before landing backwards.

The teenager, who switched allegiance from the United States to China in 2019, shed tears of joy after landing cleanly and realizing she had pulled off the move. "The tears were mostly of joy, that I had pushed myself to the absolute limit," Gu said. "That was the best moment of my life. I just cannot believe what just happened."

Gu, born to an American father and Chinese mother, has captivated China and is also competing in the freeski halfpipe and slopestyle. Being called a genius girl, ski prodigy, grade-A student, Vogue cover girl... what qualities have contributed to her success? Let's take a look.

(Shanghai Daily/Agencies)

1. SELF-BREAKTHROUGH

"I was guaranteed a podium spot when I dropped in, so I was thinking I was only 0.25 points behind Tess (Ledeux), and I was thinking, 'Should I improve on my previous one and go for the silver or should I whip out this random trick I'd never done before and go for gold?'"

"In my head, I wanted to represent myself and this competitive style that I really take pride in and that desire to push myself and push the sport," Gu said, commenting on her gold medal-winning jump.

2. PASSION

"When the soft snow flows under my ski board, I feel like I'm omnipotent."

"I'm not skiing just for the Olympic Games. I'm skiing for my passion for the sport. I started skiing at a young age because I love the feeling of snow. Only when you do the things you have passion for can you put all your heart into that."

3. HARD WORK, SELF-DISCIPLINE

"There might be some talent, but I think the way to success must be paved with self-discipline, hard work and balance of time."

"I make sure of sufficient sleep — more than 10 hours everyday. I keep writing a diary. I do my best in every move when

training. I could train for hours without eating or drinking to better control the pace of the practice."

4. COURAGE

"Every time before I did a new trick on the snow, I am afraid. But now I am more afraid of not even trying or setting limits for myself. Fear has kept me going and fighting."

5. SELF-ASSERTION

"Why don't you trust me? Can you have some faith in me?" Gu left this remark on a Chinese netizen's vlog that made some detailed technical analysis on her performance on snow and doubted her ability to win gold.

6. GIRL POWER

"I was often the only girl on the training course when I took up skiing. I got upset like should I talk like or dress like a boy. But now I'm no longer upset. I'm not a boy and girls can do sports too," Gu said in a documentary on her teenage life

"I hope this (the completion of 1620) inspires more girls to take up freeskiing," Gu said on Tuesday.

7. DIVERSE LIFE

"I don't want people to have a stereotype of me. At such a beautiful age, there are infinite possibilities in the future, so

it's important to have a well-rounded life. Like other young people, I also like hanging out with friends and having parties with friends."

"For me, one of the disappointments in the past year is that we had to cancel our prom due to the pandemic."

8. MOM'S LOVE

"My mom is not a 'tiger' mom. She's a 'rabbit' mom. She respects every decision of mine and helps me how to achieve my goals."

"I know every kid would think their mother is the best. But no offence, I have the world's best mom, better than yours. Ha ha," Gu said in a documentary on her teenage life.

9. SPORTSMANSHIP

"Tess (Ledeux) has inspired me so much, I told her that I wouldn't have attempted it (her final jump) if she hadn't pushed the sport to that level," Gu said after winning the Big Air gold medal at Beijing 2022. Ledeux of France took silver.

"I think sports can unite all together, rather than being a divisive force. I don't think sports should be linked with nationality, for we are here exactly in the hope of exploring human limitations," Gu replied when asked about her nationality at a news conference after capturing the freeski Big Air gold in Beijing.

