

Journey to a sporty winter wonderland in this sixth episode of the Right2Education podcast, which takes a look at two remarkable stories from the Winter Olympic Games: a British ski jumper, and a bobsleigh team all the way from Jamaica! Listen to the episode [here](#), and read the transcript below!

Hello, everyone, and welcome to another episode of the Right2Education podcast! This episode is about the Winter Olympics, with two exciting stories!

Welcome back to the Right2Education podcast. I hope that you are doing well, and keeping safe. And I hope that everything is going well with your English studies. Remember, the best way to improve your English is to practice a little bit of English every day. You can do some reading in English, or watch an English TV show, or maybe even try to do some writing in English. But make sure that, whatever it is that you choose to do, it's something that you enjoy doing! Because that way, it will be much easier to stay motivated to learn English, and you will keep up the habit of learning a little bit every day. Find something that you find fun to do, something that you want to do, and it won't seem like work at all!

That's why, for this podcast, I pick topics to talk about that I hope you will find interesting. I don't teach grammar rules, or simply explain new words and list vocabulary. Instead, I try to find topics that you will find fun to listen to, and then you can learn English without it seeming like hard work, you can stay motivated to practice your English through listening to something interesting - you can learn, without even realizing just how much you're learning!

And for this sixth episode of the podcast, I want to talk to you about the Winter Olympics. Even though some days are very cold here in Amsterdam during the winter, with the biting winds and the freezing rain, it is very rare that the winter weather gives us the excitement of snow or freezes the water into playgrounds made of ice. And when we are lucky enough to have exciting snowy days, it very rarely lasts long enough to have any real adventures.

But, with the Winter Olympics, we can still enjoy all the excitement of a whole load of winter sports, even if we aren't able to enjoy them ourselves. We can watch as participants from lots of different countries take part to try and win events in a whole load of different competitions.

There are competitions to see who can ski downhill the fastest and who can ski the fastest cross-country; competitions to see who can jump the furthest on skis and who can perform the best tricks on a snowboard. And there are competitions in ice-skating as well, to see who is fastest racing around a course, as well as figure-skating where competitors perform a routine which can be really very spectacular.

And there are also events in which the competitors have to ride a sleigh down a track as fast as they can, which can be very exciting and very dangerous! But if you get nervous watching dangerous activities, don't worry - there's also a sport called 'curling' where teams slide disks across the ice and try to get them to stop as close as possible to a target to score points. And if you like to watch team sports, there's also an ice hockey competition which you can see. So there's really something to entertain everyone, no matter what kind of sport you usually enjoy watching!

The Winter Olympics this year start on February the 4th, and the competitions carry on all the way until the 20th of February. And on these first and last days of the event, there are big

ceremonies to celebrate the opening and closing of the Winter Olympic Games - these are always really spectacular to watch as well! There are some really remarkable performances and displays, and they allow all the athletes who are competing to celebrate their achievement in reaching the Olympics. And while the ceremonies are always different and always unique, they always remain steeped in tradition, and they show the historic origins of the Olympics.

These Winter Olympic Games are the 24th Winter Olympics since the first Winter Olympics in 1924 in France. While the first ever Summer Olympic Games were held thousands of years ago in Ancient Greece, the Winter Olympics only started much more recently. But, like the modern Summer Olympics, they are still inspired by the ancient Olympic Games, and, just like the Summer Olympics, they also take place every four years. And the country where they are held changes each time, too. Of course, the choice of country is slightly restricted as the competitions need cold and snowy winter conditions. But still, since the first Winter Olympics, they have been held in twelve countries across three different continents, including the United States of America, Austria, and Japan. And, this year, they're taking place in Beijing, in China.

In the Summer Olympics, there are always many, many countries from all over the world which compete in sports that everyone is familiar with, sports which you can do in almost any environment, which you can practice almost anywhere. No matter which country you are in, you can always train for running, and, if you have a bike, you can practice cycling. But that's not always the case for the sports in the Winter Olympics. For most of the sports of the Winter Olympics, you need very specific conditions, you need certain types of weather to be able to practice and to train - the sports all need snow and ice.

So, because of this, it is usually only the countries that have very long and cold winters which compete at the Winter Olympics. In the countries with very long and cold winters, it is possible to practice the sports a lot, the weather conditions allow the athletes to do a lot of training. And so these are the countries which have the best teams to compete at the Winter Olympics.

Every four years, all the hard work of these athletes is put to the test. You can see athletes who have spent a huge amount of time training, and who have put in a huge amount of effort, pushing themselves right to their limits as they try to win. And when you see the athletes appreciated for their hard work, when you see their happiness as all their effort is rewarded, it is really very heart-warming! You can see just how proud the athletes are to represent their country, and they simply light up with immense joy when they win the biggest competition in their sport to become the best in the world.

But my favourite stories from the Winter Olympics, don't actually involve any winners. And they don't even involve any of the countries that you would really expect to find at the Winter Olympic Games. Those are the two stories that I want to tell you about today. So, are you ready to travel to a winter wonderland of sport and hear about two exciting stories of dedication and determination? Great - let's begin!

The first story is the story of an athlete who was nicknamed 'Eddie The Eagle'. But his real name is Michael David Edwards. He comes from the same country as me, from England, and he represented England in the Winter Olympic Games in 1988 in the ski jumping competition.

And that's how he got his nickname. Eddie The Eagle participated in the ski jumping competition, an event where the competitors ski down a really very steep and long slope which has a ramp at the end of it, and they have to try and jump as far as they can away from the ramp. And they can jump so far, that it almost seems as if they are flying! His surname 'Edwards' was shortened to 'Eddie', and because he would soar through the air as he jumped, he was quickly named after the eagle, which is a bird often associated with strength, power, and royalty.

But how did someone from the South of England, where there really isn't very much snow at all, become a competitor in ski jumping at the Winter Olympic Games?

Eddie first went skiing when he was thirteen years old while on holiday. And he immediately fell in love with the sport. And, even though you can't really do a lot of skiing in England, he was determined to carry on with the sport. And so he practised skiing on dry slopes, artificial - or fake - slopes with surfaces that are very similar to the surface of snow on which people can still perform many snow-based winter sports. And he also travelled to the north of the United Kingdom to Scotland so that he could practice on real snow; even though the conditions aren't the same as the famous skiing locations that you can find in France and Switzerland, the winters in Scotland can still often be cold enough for quite a lot of snow, and there are some really very impressive mountains. So Eddie still managed to find ways to practice his skiing without having to leave the country!

While he was growing up, he trained to become a downhill skier - that was the sport in which he really wanted to compete, where participants race each other on a course down the side of the mountain to try to get to the bottom first. But, even though Eddie had trained really hard, he unfortunately was not good enough to get a place on the downhill skiing team.

But he still didn't give up on his dreams of taking part in the Winter Olympics. And so he looked for another competition in which he could try again to be selected for the British team. And he found that there were no other British ski jumpers - if he applied to join the British team as a ski jumper, he would not even have to compete for a place on the team! So, even though he had never even tried a single ski jump before, Eddie joined the British Winter Olympic team as a ski jumper. And he was the first ski jumper on the team in six decades! For sixty years, no one else had been a British ski jumper!

He had done it! He had made the British Winter Olympic team, and he would represent the country in international competitions! But he still hadn't qualified to take part in the Winter Olympics themselves. And he had still never done a ski jump before! So he began to train. To learn how to jump, Eddie travelled to New York. But he didn't have any of his own equipment. Fortunately, he had found a coach who was able to lend him equipment that he could use to practice. But, unfortunately, the equipment wasn't the right size for Eddie - it didn't fit him properly. The boots were so big that he had to wear six pairs of socks just to make sure that they didn't fall off! And that wasn't the only equipment problem. Eddie was very near-sighted and had a lot of difficulty in seeing things that were far away, so he always had to wear very thick glasses to be able to see - even under his ski goggles! And in the very cold weather, these glasses would get very misty, they would get very foggy, and he could hardly see at all! But still Eddie wasn't discouraged. He remained determined to participate in the Winter Olympics, and he took part in his first competition at the 1987 World Championships in Germany. To be able to compete at the Winter Olympics, Eddie just needed to complete a jump

- which might sound easy, but remember that in ski jumping the athletes fly really long distances, and they are travelling at such fast speeds, that successfully landing without falling over is a big challenge in itself! But Eddie managed to land his jump! And with this result he was placed as 55th in the World Championship competition; although that definitely didn't win him any medals, it was a good enough position to allow him to compete at the 1988 Winter Olympics in the Canadian city of Calgary.

So Eddie travelled all the way to Canada to live his dream, to take part in the Winter Olympic Games. He competed against the best athletes from all over the world in two different events - the 70-metre ski jump, where the hill is 70 metres high, and the 90-metre event, where the hill is (that's right!) 90 metres high. And in both events he finished last.

But Eddie's jumps still broke world records for the British Team! He hadn't won any medals, but he had still made history! And, at the closing ceremony of the 1988 Winter Olympics, his determination and remarkable motivation were recognized as the President of the Organizing Committee remarked: "You have broken world records, and you have established personal bests. Some of you have even soared like an eagle."

And after that he became something of a celebrity. Eddie was invited to appear on talk shows on television, and he was selected to be a torch-bearer at future Olympic Games, receiving the honour of carrying the Olympic torch as it carries the symbolic Olympic flame. And he also performed a charity ski jump, jumping over 10 cars to raise money for the Children In Need charity.

And his legacy still survives to this day! In 2016, a very positively reviewed film was released about his story, starring famous actors and becoming the highest grossing British film released in the UK in 2016. It made more than any other British film released that year! So, if you want to see the whole story of Eddie The Eagle, you can even enjoy watching a film about him!

Funnily enough, my other favourite story from the Winter Olympics also comes from the 1988 Winter Olympic Games in Canada, but this story is about a team from Jamaica. It's the story of the Jamaican bobsleigh team. Can you imagine?! A winter sport team from the tropical island of Jamaica! How incredible!

So how did a group of athletes from the sunny and warm country of Jamaica end up competing at the Winter Olympics? The weather in Jamaica is certainly nothing like the winter weather of snow and ice which is needed to practice the sports of the Winter Olympics - the climate is so hot, that even in the winter in Jamaica, the daytime temperature can often be around thirty degrees! But, Jamaica does have some very strong and successful famous athletes; Usain Bolt, the man who holds the record for being the fastest man in the world, comes from Jamaica, and the Jamaican team always performs really very well at the Summer Olympics. Of course, just being athletically strong doesn't immediately mean that someone will be able to participate at the Winter Olympics - you also need to know the sport! There's a huge amount of technique involved in a lot of the winter sports, they have a very specific method which requires a lot of skill and talent to perfect.

But, although the weather in Jamaica means it's almost impossible to practice any of the winter sports, there is a sport in Jamaica which is very similar to the bobsleigh competition which is

included at the Winter Olympics - the pushcart derby. The bobsleigh event is a competition where a team have to push a sled along an icy track, and then all jump in, and drive the sled down the course going round lots of very sharp bends to try and get to the bottom in the shortest time. And the pushcart derby in Jamaica is really very similar, only it uses homemade carts with wheels which are pushed along roads rather than slippery icy tracks.

When an American diplomat working in Jamaica - who was representing his country of America in its international relationship with Jamaica - was watching the pushcart derby, he noticed that it really did look a lot like the bobsleigh competitions. And he also thought it would be really great if Jamaica was able to send a team to the Winter Olympic Games. With the support of a businessman, the American diplomat suggested his idea to the President of the Jamaican Olympic Association - and the President accepted the idea!

They had found a winter sport which they thought a Jamaican team could compete in - but they now had to find a team! All over Jamaica, they sent out adverts which invited people to apply to take part in dangerous and rigorous, very hard and very difficult, trials so that they could select the members of the first ever bobsleigh team. But the adverts were not very successful, and the trials were not very popular. It seemed that nobody was interested in joining the bobsleigh team! But still they were determined to form a team which could be sent to the Winter Olympics, and so they decided to ask the Jamaican Defence Force for volunteers. And in 1987, through looking for volunteers in the military, they were finally able to find a group of applicants from which they could select the members of the team.

Now they had a team - but they still had to train! None of them had any previous experience in any winter sport, and none of them had ever been in a bobsleigh before, and there wasn't even anywhere in Jamaica that they could practice! The team had to travel to Canada, and they also travelled even further to Austria, to train and prepare for the 1988 Winter Games.

Usually, every team that wants to participate at the Olympic Games has to qualify to show that they are good enough to compete at such a high level. But because this was the first ever Jamaican Winter Olympic Team, the International Bobsleigh Federation, who make all the decisions surrounding the international competitions of the sport, agreed that the team would be allowed to compete in the four-man and two-man events. So, after a year of training, the Jamaican bobsleigh team travelled to Calgary in Canada to compete at the 1988 Winter Olympic Games.

Although they had been practising in snowy and icy conditions, the team still had to get used to the conditions in Calgary, and so they continued to practice on a frozen lake to gain a familiarity with the icy surface on which they would be competing. But then disaster struck! As they were practising, one member of the team fell over on the slippery ice, and he hurt himself so badly that he couldn't participate in the competition! Because of an unfortunate injury, the four-man team was now down to only three members!

But the team were still very eager to compete. And so, just three days before the first day of the competition, a new member was added to the team. Where did they find a new team member at such short notice?

Well, luckily, the brother of one of the members had travelled to Canada with the team to support them, and, even though he had never done any bobsleighbing before, he volunteered to take part in the competition!

The first competition of the event was with the two-man team. They weren't the fastest team on the course, finishing 34th on the first run, but they improved on their second run to finish 22nd, and on their third run they finished 31st to give them a final position of 30th out of the forty-one teams which were competing. And while that may not sound so impressive, remember that this was the first ever winter sports competition that the pair had ever taken part in, and they finished ahead of eleven other teams!

And after this performance, the Jamaican team had started to gain more and more attention, so that by the time of the four-man event, a lot of people were following the team, and they had a lot of support and encouragement. But, unfortunately, on their first run, disaster struck once again! As they were jumping into the bobsleigh at the start of the course, the push-bar, which is used to get the sleigh moving as quickly as possible, snapped off! And, with this technical issue, the team finished their first run 24th out of the twenty-six teams competing. But things didn't improve on the team's second run. One team member struggled to get into his position, and he remained sitting very straight upright for the start of the course, which slowed them down a huge amount. And their time for this second run placed them at 25th, second to last.

On the third run, the team got off to a much better start. In fact, they were so fast, that for the first part of the course, the team set the 7th fastest time out of all of the competitors! But they were going so fast, that at a really sharp corner, the team lost control of the bobsleigh and crashed into the wall of the track, and the whole bobsleigh flipped over on top of the athletes! It seemed as if the competition was over for the team. Crashing at such high speeds can be really very dangerous, and, even though the team were lucky to have avoided any serious injuries, they were all hurt and the experience would definitely have been really very scary! But the team were still determined to finish the course. And so, they climbed out of the damaged bobsleigh, and they pushed it along the rest of the course and across the finish line. Of course, the time for the third run was really very slow - it was the only run of the whole competition which took over one minute. After the crash, they decided that they would not compete in the fourth run of the event - and even if they had done, they would have had to complete the course in an incredible, and almost impossible, world-record shattering time to win a medal. So, overall, the Jamaican team finished last in the four-man event.

But, although they didn't win any medals, the team left a truly remarkable legacy! Their story is really an incredible example of dedication and motivation. Not only did they pave the way for Jamaican athletes to compete at future Winter Olympic Games, but their commitment and determination is inspirational no matter what your aims are.

And if you want to know more about their story, there is a film about them as well! It's called 'Cool Runnings', and it's really very heart-warming and uplifting to watch!

So, those are my two favourite stories from previous Winter Olympics. But who knows? Maybe at this year's Winter Olympic Games, there will be some even more remarkable stories! And I'm sure that there will be some incredibly inspirational moments, and there will certainly be a huge

amount of very impressive achievements. I'm definitely excited to see all the magical moments that this year's event will bring! And maybe, if you weren't interested in the Winter Olympics before, the stories from today's podcast have shown you how wonderful the competition can be.

But, from me, that's all for today. For the next episode of the Right2Education podcast, I've got another original topic to talk to you about - pancakes! And I'll even be including a recipe so that you can enjoy some of your very own delicious pancakes! So make sure not to miss it! But, in the meantime, keep on practising your English, and, most importantly, take care of yourself and stay safe. And I'll see you all next time!