

## Episode 76: The Winter Olympics

### Summary

Nick and Wendy talk about their memories of the Winter Olympics from childhood, and Nick talks about his experiences volunteering and working at four Winter Olympics for the Olympic News Service.

### Transcript

Nick: Today Wendy and I are talking about the Winter Olympics. Umm, the Winter Olympics are going on<sup>1</sup> right now, as we're recording and publishing this, in PyeongChang. And so we're going to talk about our memories and experiences with the Winter Olympics. So, Wendy, what do you remember about watching the Winter Olympics when you were younger?

Wendy: Well, for me, the Winter Olympics was always about figure skating. And that's pretty much the only sport that I watched during the Winter Olympics. And I think that was mostly the case for my family as well. I have a small family; I was an only child, so it was basically just me and my parents when I was growing up. And my parents loved the Olympics, both the Summer and the Winter Olympics. But, yeah, I think that they mostly just watched the figure skating too. Maybe my Dad watched ... well, he probably watched more, 'cause he watched a lot of TV. Umm, but, yeah, figure skating was what I really loved, and it's still what I love today. And it's the only sport that I watch, really, in the Winter Olympics, but I watch everything that I possibly can about figure skating.

Nick: Yeah, I guess it's always been one of the prime time<sup>2</sup> events, especially for a US audience, that people have watched.

Wendy: Yeah, yeah, it's definitely one of the most popular ones, and, you know, it's the one that gets a lot of coverage on television, for sure.

Nick: Yeah, growing up in Australia, we didn't really watch the Winter Olympics at all. I don't even think I was even aware of the Winter Olympics.

Wendy: Wow.

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<sup>1</sup> going on: taking place, occurring, happening

<sup>2</sup> prime time: the evening time period when television audiences are usually the largest

Nick: Umm, you know, as a young child, and I was really into the Summer Olympics, umm, but because the Winter Olympics were always in Europe or North America, and so the time zone was never good for Australian TV, uhh, we didn't have cable television in Australia at that time - uhh, this is in the late eighties or the early nineties - and there weren't really Australian athletes competing, and so the Winter Olympics just was not a thing at all.

Wendy: Yeah, that's really interesting. Because I always saw the Summer and the Winter Olympics more or less equally. I thought they were equally important and equally major events on the world stage.

Nick: Yeah, and that's true in certain countries I guess, but in Australia, no. The Summer Olympics was huge and the Winter Olympics was just nothing. Umm, and I guess that's true for a lot of other countries where they don't have, umm, the kind of conditions that you can do the snow sports in, or the ice sports.

Wendy: Sure, if they don't have snow or ice, then it's difficult to do those sports.

Nick: Umm, and I remember the 1998 Games were in Japan and that was the first Winter Olympics that I was really aware of, so I was already 18 at that time.

Wendy: Wow.

Nick: But, umm, or it was the only one that was ... yeah, as it was going on, it was on television because the time zone was good for Australian television, umm, and so I watched a little bit of it on television. Uhh, but that was it, really, up till that point. You know, I remember being so excited for the previous, probably, three Summer Olympics, umm, but the Winter Olympics was kind of nothing. And it's funny now that it's actually my preferred form of the two, and I really love the Winter Olympics now, but, yeah, it wasn't something that I grew up with at all in childhood. Umm, but I've been lucky to have gone to the last four of them before this current Games or these current Games in PyeongChang.

Wendy: Yeah, that's something that not many people can say. Umm, and I've actually never been to a Winter Olympics. I've been to two Summer Olympics, but, uhh, not the winter ones. So tell us, how did that come about? Why did you ... how have you been so lucky?

Nick: Yeah, well it started because I was at university when the Sydney Olympics were on in 2000, this is the Summer Olympics obviously. And that was in my home city. And I was studying journalism and I was in my final year, and so our group or our year of students were targeted by the organisers to help as volunteers at the Sydney Olympics. Because we were ... we had the experience, or the education, if you like, of having almost graduated university in journalism, but were still young and looking for opportunities for work, and so we would accept volunteer positions because we were looking for more experience. And so it was a kind of perfect

storm<sup>3</sup> in that way. And so I did that and I loved it and it was an amazing opportunity and an amazing experience for me. And so then I realised that there was a Winter Olympics only a year-and-a-half later in Salt Lake City in the United States. And one of the guys who I'd worked for, one of the core<sup>4</sup> management teams of the operation that I'd worked for in the Sydney Olympics had moved on a short-term basis to Salt Lake City to work for the organising committee there as well. And so I was told ... I was put back in touch with<sup>5</sup> him and he told me who I needed to contact if I wanted to volunteer again to do the same work, working with the media, working for the Olympic News Service, in Salt Lake City. So I sent an email to the head of the Olympic News Service and said, 'I've done this once before, I'd really love to do it again.' And he wrote back straight away<sup>6</sup> and said, 'We'd love to have you, because we...', he said, you know, they appreciated the service that was put on for Sydney, that it was really well done. Umm, and so they were happy to have someone who had done it before because a lot of their volunteers had not done it before. And so I had to pay my own way<sup>7</sup> there and find accommodation. I stayed with a lady and her son who lived there, they were very nice to rent out - or to not even to rent out - to give me a room in their house.

Wendy: Oh, so you didn't pay at all for the accommodation?

Nick: No, I didn't pay. There was some kind of, umm, online service where people were offering rooms for people coming for the Games, or, I don't remember exactly how it worked but I was aware that this room was available and so I asked for it and I got it. But I was already planning to travel that year anyway, and so I had been to Europe and then I went to the States and so it all worked out really well. So that was my first experience at the Winter Olympics, and like I said, I'd watched a little bit of the previous one on TV and that was it. But it was great. I was at speed skating, I didn't have a huge amount of responsibility as a volunteer so we just had a lot of fun. Speed skating has a very, umm, light competition schedule so it means that you can ... or it means that I had the opportunity to go to other events as well. So I saw ski jumping for the first time, I saw bobsleigh for the first time, I saw a lot of figure skating and short track speed skating as well, and so I had a blast<sup>8</sup>. It was amazing. And so from that point on, I've really been super interested in the Winter Olympics.

Wendy: Great, and then, so the other Olympic Games that you were at, were you also volunteering or what were you doing?

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<sup>3</sup> perfect storm: result of an unlikely combination of different things (the original use was negative but it is becoming more common to use it positively, as Nick has done here)

<sup>4</sup> core: central, important. (also: the central part of a fruit like an apple.)

<sup>5</sup> in touch with: in contact with (see also: Episode 46: Morocco ... the first time)

<sup>6</sup> straight away: immediately

<sup>7</sup> pay my own way: pay for everything myself

<sup>8</sup> a blast: a great time (informal)

Nick: Well, you know the answer to this.

Wendy: I do know the answer, but not everyone does.

Nick: Well, by this point having volunteered twice, umm, I'd got, you know, some experience and I was moving forward a little bit in my career other than that. And so then I was able to get paid positions after that. And so I continued to go to the Olympics because I was now in a circle of people who I knew and so it became easier to learn about opportunities that were coming in subsequent Games. So the next Winter Olympics were in, uhh, Torino, it's the Italian city - Turin is what we call it in English. Uhh, it's in, uhh, Piedmont, uhh, which is in the north-west of Italy, where the mountains are, very close to France. So I went there, and I was at ski jumping, uhh, and so it was in a very small village called Pragelato. It was quite separated from the other, uhh, the other venues and the other events. But that was amazing because it was a beautiful little village. I mean, the mountains surrounded it were amazing and there was a lot of snow around, and we could just walk to the ski jump. And that was fantastic, I really loved that.

And so then I became a kind of ski jumping guy, umm, because I did a lot of research and a lot of preparation to really learn ski jumping because I had this role<sup>9</sup> where I had to write reviews and previews about ski jumping and help some journalists who weren't that familiar with it, uhh, to explain the rules to them and things like that. Uhh, so then for the next Games in Vancouver 2010 I was also at ski jumping, and this was in Whistler, which is the famous ski resort that's close to Vancouver. And so we had a great time there as well. We stayed up in Whistler. We were in these, umm, chalets<sup>10</sup>, you know, these ski chalets, and so we were staying there and then, uhh, we would go to the venue and watch the ski jumping and participate ... uhh, or cover ski jumping as reporters. And then the next one was Sochi 2014 and again I was at ski jumping. And when we do ski jumping we also do Nordic combined, which is a combination of ski jumping and cross country skiing, umm, and so we also are involved in the ski jumping portion of Nordic combined. So it's not just one sport but it's kind of one-and-a-half sports, if you like, that we do. Umm, and so Sochi was a little bit of a different experience because we were, even though we were at a mountain venue for ski jumping, we were staying in the city, and so we had to travel up by train every day. And we were quite lucky that there was a train, a special train that they had built for the Olympics, and that ski jumping was the closest of the mountain venues. Because the guys who were at biathlon, I think was the furthest, and they had to travel, I think, two, two-and-a-half hours every day, each way, uhh, just to get to their venue and back. And so we had it a little bit easier than that, umm, but still it was a different kind of experience. It was good because it meant we got to see the other

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<sup>9</sup> role: job, position

<sup>10</sup> chalet: wooden, traditional style ski lodge (the word comes from French and is still pronounced in the singular as it is in French; for the plural, English-speakers add the 's' sound whereas French speakers do not)

people who were our colleagues working in the city more often, you know, in the evening or in the morning before we left for work, umm, but it wasn't quite as nice (as) to be really staying in the mountains and to, you know, have the snow under your feet all the time and all of that.

Wendy: Yeah, and I know that you have become a ski jumping fan after all of this experience. So that is ... I know that's one that you're watching. Would you say that that's your favourite Winter Olympic sport?

Nick: I think now it's been overtaken by alpine skiing, but, yeah, I mean I've been watching ski jumping now for twelve years and before that I didn't know anything about it. But, umm, because you have the World Cup tour there's a lot of events that you can watch during the season leading up to the Olympics and so you can really learn about it, and, umm, that's what I've done.

Wendy: Great.

## Comprehension Questions

1. Why didn't Nick watch the Winter Olympics as a child?
2. Why did Nick enjoy his first Winter Olympics experience in Salt Lake City?
3. What did Nick say was one of the differences in his experience at Sochi 2014 compared with the two previous Games?

## Exercises

*Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.*

1. Apple started as a computer company but now their \_\_\_\_\_ business is mobile devices.
2. She got a promotion last week. Now she has a new \_\_\_\_\_ role in the organisation and with it comes more responsibility.
3. Whenever he gets a text message, he always drops whatever he's doing so he can respond \_\_\_\_\_.
4. When the Olympics take place on the other side of the world, television ratings often go down because the best events aren't in \_\_\_\_\_.
5. There was a big festival for Chinese New Year last weekend, with lots of things \_\_\_\_\_ in Chinatown.
6. My grandmother had \_\_\_\_\_ at her 90th birthday party. She was dancing with all her grandkids and ate more cake than anyone!
7. They're going to the Alps to go skiing. They've rented a \_\_\_\_\_ for the week right near the slopes.
8. Thanks to the Internet, I'm now back \_\_\_\_\_ a lot of my schoolfriends who I hadn't spoken to in years.
9. I really wanted to attend a conference but my boss wouldn't send me there, so I decided to \_\_\_\_\_ and go anyway, even though it wasn't cheap.
10. With the heat, the drought and the winds, you have the \_\_\_\_\_ for dangerous wildfires to break out and spread all across the state.

## Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Do you like watching the Winter Olympics? If so, which winter sports do you like and why?
2. Nick mentioned that he volunteered at two Olympic Games to gain experience in his field. Have you ever done volunteer work and, if so, what kind? What was the experience like?
3. If you worked at the Winter Olympics, would you rather stay in the city and work at an ice event or stay in the mountains and work at a snow event? Why?

## Answers

### Comprehension Questions

1. He said the Winter Olympics weren't on television in Australia because the timezones weren't suitable, because there was no cable television at the time and because there weren't many Australian athletes competing.
2. He enjoyed it because he was able to see lots of different sports for the first time.
3. In Sochi his accommodation was in the city so he and his colleagues had to travel to the mountains and back every day, rather than staying in the mountains.

### Exercises

1. core
2. role
3. straight away
4. prime time
5. going on
6. a blast
7. chalet
8. in touch with
9. pay my own way
10. perfect storm