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## Winter Olympics History - Speed Skating - Figure Skating Russian Pairs

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For nearly a week now the Seventeenth Winter Olympics has filled television screens across the world. In the United States CBS and TNT have carried countless hours of competition, and Norwegian television is offering a first, the Olympics in 3-D.

The Winter Olympics have never drawn the audience that the Summer Games have, but for me they are the superior version. When the modern Olympics was created in 1896 they were summer only. Winter sports were housed in the summer games, with ice skating events taking place as early as the 1908 games, and ice hockey joining the games in 1920.

The Scandinavian countries along with the British pushed hard for a separate winter version of the Olympics, to showcase those sports that were for the most part invented in their nations. The opposition saw winter sports as involving too narrow a geographical base and not able to bring together the youth of all the world the way the summer games did. The advocates of winter sports eventually prevailed and the first Winter Olympics was held at Chamonix, France in 1924. Not surprisingly the Norwegians dominated the skiing events with 11 medals, while the Finns dominated speed-skating, winning four of the five gold medals.

The 1928 games at St. Moritz were again dominated by the Scandinavians, and produced the first gold medal for Sonja Henie, who would return in 1932 and '36 to three-repeat. In the process she established the tradition of women's figure skating as the glamor event of the winter games.

In 1932 the winter games came to Lake Placid and the United States for the first time, and in 1936 the winter version of the Nazi Olympics were held in Garmisch. After time off for war the Winter Games resumed in 1948 again at St. Moritz and quickly grew in interest and stature. The memorable moments were a gold medal performance in men's figure skating by Dick Button, and Gretchen Fraser's gold in the women's slalom. Button repeated four years later at Oslo.

For the first time in 1952 at Oslo the Winter Olympics were contested in a Scandanavian country, and for the first time women competed in nordic skiing. Perhaps the most important development in the Winter Games came in 1956 at Cortina in Italy when the Soviet Union competed for the first time. This brought

the atmosphere of the Cold War to the Olympics, and initiated the Soviet-U.S. rivalry that would be the focus of the Olympics for many people over the years.

1960 was notable for the addition of women's speed-skating, and for the fact that the American hockey team led by goalie Jack McCartan won the gold medal on an outdoor rink in Squaw Valley. The U.S. hockey team would win the gold again exactly 20 years later at Lake Placid. In 1964 at Innsbruck and 1968 at Grenoble interest in the Winter games increased, and made super-stars out of Peggy Fleming and Jean-Claude Killy..

As the games grew in size and popularity the television audience and the crowds in attendance increased correspondingly, as did TV rights paid by the American networks. In 1960 it was a mere \$50,000; for Lake Placid in 1980, \$15.5M; in 1984 at Sarajevo the fee was \$91.5M. The figure of \$309M for the Calgary games in 1988 was staggering and an aberration. Realism returned with the rights fee of \$243M for the Albertville games, while this year it's \$295M. In 1998 CBS will pay out \$375M.

This year's games are the largest ever in number of athletes competing, 2,680, number of events 61, and number of nations participating, 80. Already in the first few days the drama has been high.

Dan Jansen seems forever cursed at the Olympic Games. Just two weeks before the games, and twice in the last few months, he has set new world records in the 500 meter speed skating event. Then he gets on the Olympic track and he can't get it done. As I watched him wheel around the track it looked like a wonderful run, but then on a turn in the final lap there was the small slip that cost him that fatal second which put him out of metal contention. The pain on his face, was wrapped in a half-smile, as another dream ended. It was Calgary and Albertville all over again.

Pairs figure skating, almost always dominated by Russians, brought more drama. The Canadians, Brasseur and Eisler, were graceful and technically superb, but the Russians are in a zone of their own. The more subdued team of Gordeeva and Grinkov, but especially Mishkutienok and Dimitriev, bring a passion to the ice that displays a particular expression of Russian culture. It is that same passion one finds in the plays of Chekov, the novels of Dostoyevsky, and music of Prokofiev or Shostakovitch. It is a passion for life in all its glory and tragedy, and it is displayed magnificently in the artistry of this beautiful sport,

and seldom any better than by Natalya Mishkutienok and Artur Dimitriev in their silver medal performance Tuesday night.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport, to be a bad luger.

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