

Winter Olympics Part 2

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE - WINTER OLYMPICS PART 2
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At any Olympic Games there are constants and surprises and the ongoing Winter Olympics is no exception.

In terms of the constants, the Dutch dominance in speed skating continues. Six gold medals and eleven overall medals put them well ahead of all other competitors in these events. The Dutch have won a total of 105 medals in Olympic speed skating all-time.

Two things make headlines in speed skating: Record-breaking and someone winning gold as a first for a nation. In the latter category Nao Kordaira became the first Japanese woman to win speed skating gold by winning the women's 500m race. Norway also won its first gold in twenty years as Havard Lorentzen set an Olympic record in the men's 500m, a race in which Cha Min Kyu won silver also setting an Olympic record, and Gao Tingyu won the first speed skating medal ever for China. Lorentzen broke Kyu's record and won the gold by one-hundredth of a second.

Close often comes in hundredths of a second and sometimes in surprising ways. Ester Ledecka of the Czech Republic did both in the Super G. Ledecka's primary sport is snowboarding but she does dabble in skiing. She persuaded her coaches to allow her to compete in the Super G and she was the 27th skier to come down the hill. She won by one-hundredth of a second, in a race that may have surprised her more than anyone else. After finishing the race she stood with a look of disbelief on her face, not seeming to know what just happened.

It was a bad moment for NBC as they stopped their Super G coverage after the 17th skier, telling the television audience that the event was virtually over. Maybe it was, but the real occasionally supersedes the virtual, and NBC had to come back to the Super G and show a replay of Ledecka's amazing run. It was also a bad moment for Anna Veith of Austria who saw gold turn into silver, and for Lindsey Vonn whose bronze medal disappeared as she was pushed down to fourth place.

Cross Country events, including the Biathlon, often produce dramatic finishes. In the 15km Mass Start Biathlon the Frenchman, Martin Fourcade, lunged at the finish line to win over Simon Schempp of Germany. It was a photo finish and showed Fourcade approximately four inches ahead of Schempp. Four years ago Fourcade suffered the same fate in the same event when Emil

Hegle Svendsen of Sweden won by less than four centimeters, denying Fourcade the gold medal. Fourcade is now the most decorated French skier in Olympic history.

Another amazing Cross Country race, the first Olympic race ever for Simen Krueger of Norway, produced another improbable result. In the first lap Krueger slipped and fell and two other skiers fell on top of him. He managed to untangle from the pile and resumed the 30km race with a one of his poles broken. He was in last place with 63 skiers in front of him. He got another pole from one of his coaches and began the long struggle back. With 5km remaining he took the lead, and, along with his two Norwegian teammates, swept the medals.

In Skeleton Lizzy Yarnold became the first Briton to defend a title in the Winter games. She was trailing Janine Flock of Austria after the third run and with a record setting fourth run Yarnold took the gold medal. Laura Deas of Britain won the bronze. In an interesting side note the British women were wearing "skin suits" that had been developed for the British cyclists for the Olympics. They have dominated in the last three summer games. The drag resistant suits were developed by scientists at TotalSlim in Northhampton. Performance enhancement can come in many forms.

Luge produced another sort of drama. Felix Loch was set to win his third consecutive gold medal in men's luge. On his fourth run things went awry, and, in a shocking result, Loch slipped from first to fifth place. One writer compared this development to watching Usain Bolt trip over his own feet and losing a race. Loch explained his error to reporters and then said, "But it's only sport, shit happens." Indeed it does, and not just in sport.

Some of the best moments in any Olympics occur when athletes from the host nation win medals, or just compete successfully especially when they are not expected to do much of anything. South Korea has had a number of these moments. In short track and long track speed skating they have won gold, silver, and bronze. The joint South and North Korean hockey team has been a crowd favorite and when they managed to score a goal there was jubilation in the stands. The women's curling team has achieved the status of national heroes as they have moved into medal contention. The "Garlic Girls," named for the home region of the team members where garlic is a major product, have become a national obsession.

Also worthy of note is the dominance of the Norwegians in the skiing events. As of Monday the Norwegians had won 11 medals awarded in cross country and five of the eight gold medals. It is likely they will surpass the total medals record, thirteen, as there were four more cross country events remaining. (Through Wednesday that total did reach thirteen with eight gold)

Finally special recognition must be given to the Russian Curler for his failed drug test. Alexander Krushelnytsky, in a medals sweep, has earned a gold medal for stupidity, a silver for denseness, and a bronze for cluelessness. With the Russian athletes under extra scrutiny for doping, Sasha has shown himself to be truly special.

On a higher note this Winter Olympics remains notable as a test of human persistence and ability, with the most important being to achieve a personal best, whatever the sport or level of skill.

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

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