

‘Here is what elite sport should really be’

Going out with a bang: The Winter Olympics cost South Korea around £9 billion. © Getty

Have we just witnessed the pinnacle of sport? The Winter Olympics brought us a world where have-a-go heroes stand beside athletes of astounding ability and where sometimes the underdog wins.

“Ah, Winter Olympics, how I love you. And in so many ways. Every four years, you emerge on some random mountaintop or other, and delight me with your ludicrous event categories, crazy personalities, and your fabulously kitsch costumes.”

So wrote the *Financial Times* journalist Jo Ellison, putting into words what so many seem to have been thinking over the past 19 days

The 2018 Winter Olympics may just be remembered as the moment sport rediscovered its essence.

The games, which threatened to be overshadowed by the same two issues that dogged the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, namely doping and political sniping, have been deemed a huge success.

Yesterday there was even a final flourish in the [rapprochement between North and South Korea](#) that might even herald the end of a divided peninsula.

“The Winter Games is basically a sports event designed for people who hate watching sport,” wrote Ellison. “For starters, the rules are idiot-proof; unlike football or cricket, where people go on for days about fine points of gamesmanship, most events just require competitors to complete acts of daring without, please God, smashing into a tree, slicing their hand off with a bladed shoe, or ploughing brain-first into a crevasse.

“No one needs to understand the rules of luge to enjoy watching a man launch himself on to a tiny sled before hurtling down a compacted ice tunnel at nine million miles per hour...Neither do you need to have studied the code to comprehend the heroic insanity of skiing off a giant mountainside ramp into thin air.”

But the Winter Olympics do not have the universality of its rival. The **medal table - Norway**, Germany, Canada, USA, Netherlands, Sweden - is a litany of rich countries with cold winters. The rags-to-riches stories of East African long-distance runners or Jamaican sprinters are much rarer in the Winter Olympics.

So which do you prefer?

Ice cool

“Winter all the way”, say some. The sports are more extreme, the conditions more testing, and the results consequentially more spectacular. There are no professionals taking centre stage, keeping the Olympics closer to its original ideal. And all that smooth ice and snow make the whole thing so much prettier!

“Come off it”, reply others. The events in the Summer Olympics are so much more universal: simple throwing, running, swimming, jumping. No need for expensive equipment to compete, making the sports available equally to rich and poor. And think of the most memorable Olympic moments - almost all come from summer.

YOU DECIDE

1. Which do you prefer: the Winter Olympics or the Summer Olympics?
2. Have you enjoyed the Winter Olympics?

ACTIVITIES

1. You have one minute, working on your own. Write down as many names as possible that you associate with these Winter Olympics. Then compare with the rest of your class.
2. The next Winter Olympics will be held in Beijing. Design a billboard advertisement encouraging people in your country to watch them.

SOME PEOPLE SAY...

“For sure it is painful but we call it type-two fun, where it’s just painful in the moment”

American cross country skier Jessica Diggins

What do you think?

Q & A

What do we know?

The Winter Olympics have come to a close after two and a half weeks of stunning sport in Pyeongchang, South Korea. The games have risen to compete with the Summer games in reputation, with scarcely any difference in the viewing figures. We know that this Winter Olympics will largely be remembered for the attempts at diplomacy between the hosts, South Korea, and North Korea.

What do we not know?

Whether, in the coming months, further allegations of doping will tarnish the reputation of these Olympics in the way they will forever be associated with Sochi 2014. Despite being banned from the games as a nation, 169 Russians competed as “Olympic Athletes from Russia”, and one of their medal winners has already been found doping.

WORD WATCH

Rapprochement between North and South Korea

Present at the Opening Ceremony was Kim Yo-jong, the sister of Kim Jong-un, marking the first time that a member of Kim's ruling dynasty had visited South Korea since the Korean war. There was also a team of North Korean cheerleaders.

Medal table

Thirty countries made the medal table this year, compared with 86 in the most recent Summer Olympics. No medals went to countries from Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and South and South-East Asia.

Norway

Despite a population of just over 5 million, Norway claimed 14 gold medals, including six in cross-country skiing.

Lying down, head first

This event is known as the skeleton. Great Britain's only gold medal came in the women's skeleton courtesy of Lizzie Yarnold.

102 medal events

The 15 sports were: alpine skiing, biathlon, bobsleigh, cross-country skiing, curling, figure skating, freestyle skiing, ice hockey, luge, Nordic combined, short track speed skating, skeleton, ski jumping, snowboarding and speed skating.

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