

## **Your Shortcut to the... Winter Olympics**

It started with just 16 countries and a handful of events; it involves ice, snow, and people willingly hurtling downhill, and it proves you don't need to live in a cold country to compete at the highest level... This is your Squiz Kids Shortcut to the Winter Olympics — the podcast where we dive into the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the big news stories. I'm Christie Kijurina.

And I'm Bryce Corbett.

I know I'm going to regret asking, but Bryce, why are you lying face down on the studio floor on a skateboard?

Isn't it obvious? I'm training for skeleton, Christie. Did you know athletes hit over 140 kilometres an hour? That's 87 miles an hour.

But, you're not moving...

Yes, but this is just phase one...

Right. Well, I'm both impressed and deeply concerned.

Today, we'll take you through where the Winter Olympics began and where they're being held now, what makes the sports so extreme, and why this year's Games are such a big deal. So grab your beanie, zip up your jacket, and let's hit the ice.

Listen carefully. There's a S'Quiz at the end.

### **WHERE**

To understand where the Winter Olympics are happening today, we need to head back more than 100 years — to a mountain town in France called Chamonix in 1924.

And back then, it wasn't even officially called the Winter Olympics. It was known as International Winter Sports Week — almost like a trial run.

Exactly. Only 16 countries took part, with a small number of events, mostly skiing and skating.

And it was very Europe-focused. If you had snow and mountains, you were in. If you didn't... tough luck.

For years, the Winter Olympics stayed much smaller than the Summer Games. In fact, they were held in the same year. Which meant one massive Olympic year, every four years.

World events shaped them too. World War II meant there were no Winter Olympics for 12 years. Germany and Japan weren't even invited to the first Games after the war, which shows how closely the Olympics can be tied to global politics.

But once the Games returned, they kept growing — more countries, more athletes, and eventually, much bigger venues. Which brings us to today and Milano Cortina 2026 — and these are some of the most unusual Winter Games ever. Because instead of one main host city...

this year the events are spread across the largest geographic area in Winter Olympic history.

That's right, Bryce! The games are being held in Italy...and there are two main centres. The city of Milan will host many of the ice sports, like ice hockey and figure skating, inside big city stadiums.

And Cortina d'Ampezzo, up in the Dolomite mountains, will host the snow and sliding sports — alpine skiing, bobsleigh, and curling — on real mountain terrain.

The two locations are five hours apart. So from one small mountain town in France.....to an entire country linking cities and mountains together.... the where of the Winter Olympics has changed alot...

But the sports themselves have changed even more... So telll us, Christie, what do the Winter Olympics actually involve... and how come athletes end up racing downhill, head-first on ice, faster than I can drive on the motorway...

WHAT

Bryce, at their heart, the Winter Olympics are all about sports played on snow and ice — things like skiing, skating, ice hockey, and curling.

But they're not exactly gentle sports anymore, are they?

Not even close. In the early days, most events were about skill and endurance — staying upright on skis or skates in freezing conditions.

And then someone, somewhere, thought, "What if we made it much faster... and much scarier?"

It's a bit like that! Over time, the Winter Olympics started adding sports that pushed speed, risk, and gravity to the limit.

And that brings us to one of the most dramatic-sounding sports of all and one of my favourites — skeleton. Skeleton involves athletes lying face-down, head-first, on a tiny sled, racing down an icy track. With no steering wheel. No brakes. And speeds of over 140 kilometres an hour!

The sled looks a little bit like a human ribcage — which is where the name skeleton comes from. It's also a sport Australians have done surprisingly well in. Australia's Winter Olympic success really kicked off in the early 2000s.

That's right, Christie, that's when Alisa Camplin won Australia's first-ever Winter Olympic gold medal in freestyle skiing at the Salt Lake City 2002 Winter Games.

And not long after, Steven Bradbury pulled off one of the most famous wins in Olympic history. He stayed upright when everyone else fell over in the 1000m short-track speed skating final to come from behind and take gold.

He gave Australia a brand-new phrase — “doing a Bradbury” — meaning you hang in there, never quit, and take your chance when it comes.

And Bryce as the Games kept evolving, another influence stepped in: the Winter X Games. That's where action sports like snowboarding halfpipe, slopestyle, and big air really took off.

Today's Winter Olympics look a lot more extreme than they did a few decades ago as the X Games acted as a testing ground for new Olympic sports.

And this year, there's a brand-new sport making its Olympic debut — ski mountaineering, or SkiMo. This one's a bit different. Athletes ski or hike up mountains before racing back down again.

Yeah, they have to attach special “skins” to the bottom of their skis so they don't slide backwards on the climb.

And Bryce, Australia has two athletes competing in SkiMo

We sure do...Phillip Bellingham and Lara Hamilton — which is pretty impressive for a country better known for beaches than blizzards.

So from careful skiing and skating...to head-first ice racing, gravity-defying jumps, and climbing mountains on skis. The what and how of the Winter Olympics have changed dramatically.

And that makes me wonder — just how big are these Games now... and why should we be watching?

WHY

Why should we be paying attention to this year's Winter Olympics? There are so many reasons I don't know where to start... How about..The Winter Olympics now feature more than 3,500 athletes from over 90 countries, competing for nearly 200 medals.

Which is wild when you remember it started with just 16 countries in one mountain town.

Exactly. And the scale is a big reason why these Games matter — even for countries without much snow...like Australia

Like Australia! In fact, Australia is sending 53 athletes to the 2026 Winter Olympics — our second-largest Winter Olympic team ever. And more than 60 per cent of them are women, which is a pretty big deal.

It is. And Australians will be competing every single day of the Games.

Wow! So who should we be watching?

For Australia, keep an eye on Jakara Anthony, who's the defending Olympic champion in moguls. Moguls is skiing down a steep, bumpy slope at speed, with sharp turns and two big jumps where athletes perform tricks — all while being judged on speed, control, and style.

And snowboarder Scotty James, who's already won Olympic silver and bronze and will be chasing gold.

There's also Bree Walker...a bobsleigh pilot, steering a sled down an icy track at terrifying speeds — with gravity doing most of the work.

And globally, there are powerhouse winter nations like Norway, Canada, Germany, and the United States — countries with deep snow, steep mountains, and decades of winter sport history, which makes every single medal a serious contest.

And the Games don't stop when the Olympics finish. The Winter Paralympic Games follow in March and will mark 50 years since the very first Winter Paralympics.

Australia will compete in four Paralympic sports for the first time, with 15 athletes representing the country. A big step for inclusion and visibility in winter sport.

And it all starts on February 6 — that's Friday afternoon in Italy, but early Saturday morning here in Australia. And there won't just be one Olympic cauldron either.

Nope — there'll be two cauldrons, reflecting the way these Games link cities and mountains together. Which feels pretty fitting for an Olympics spread across an entire country. The perfect way to kick off a Games that's bigger, bolder, and more action-packed than ever.

## THE S'QUIZ

"This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening...

1. True or false...The Winter Olympics used to be held in the same year as the Summer Olympics? [TRUE]"

"2 Which Australian athlete famously won gold after staying upright while others crashed...was it:

a) Alyssa Camplin

b) Jakara Anthony

c) Steven Bradbury

[C STEVEN BRADBURY]"

3. Name one of the two main places hosting the 2026 Winter Olympics in Italy. [Milan or Cortina d'Ampezzo]

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for joining us as we explored the who, what, how, where, when, and why of the Winter Olympics.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day!

Over and out.