



TEAM IRELAND

GUIDE TO BEIJING 2022



A SMALL AND ELITE GROUP OF WINTER OLYMPIANS

Congratulations to each of the athletes and coaches who are set to represent Ireland at the Winter Games of the XXXIV Olympiad in Beijing.

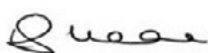
2022 marks the 30th anniversary of Ireland's participation at the Winter Olympic Games as well as a historic first. Our first athlete to compete in the sport of Luge, Elsa Desmond, will do so in Beijing.

30 years ago, in 1992, Pat McDonagh, who had rowed for Ireland at the summer games of Seoul four years earlier, led the first Irish team out as flagbearer in Albertville to compete in Bobsleigh.

Since then, only thirty-three Athletes have represented Ireland at Winter Olympic Games, so the names of the six Olympians to represent us in Beijing are among a very small and elite group to do so.

Winter athletes deserve the same high level of support accorded to our summer athletes. The achievement of competing at the Olympic Games, the pinnacle of any sporting career, deserves nothing less. That philosophy has been central to our preparations for these Games and we thank our Chef de Mission, Nancy Chillingworth, and her team for all of their hard work to deliver this.

With the many Covid 19 related challenges that each of our athletes, coaches, and winter sports have had to contend with on the road to Beijing, our 2022 athletes have shown true resilience throughout. Unfortunately, families and loved ones have been unable to travel. They, like the country as a whole will be cheering each of the Olympians to represent us, every step of the way.



Sarah Keane (President)

President, Olympic Federation of Ireland



Peter Sherrard

CEO, Olympic Federation of Ireland

WELCOME

Like Tokyo before it, Beijing is going to be a Games that will be known for taking place amidst a global pandemic. A lot of the focus of preparation has been forced to be on covid countermeasures and restrictions. Within the Olympic Federation of Ireland, this has meant more planning and adjusting of existing plans. However, for the Team Ireland athletes it has meant changes to existing qualification pathways, cancelled qualification events, training plans being completely re-done, the ever present fear of a positive test impacting their planned pathway, the list goes on.

The resilience and determination that they displayed throughout the qualification process and throughout these challenges is a credit to them and we are very much looking forward to supporting them as they achieve their dreams in Beijing 2022.

There was a lot of competition to get on the team, and while the focus over the coming weeks will naturally be on the team, it is important to acknowledge the commitment and resilience shown by those athletes who missed out on qualification. I have no doubt that they too will have their opportunity to shine in the future.

Beijing 2022 will have a number of exciting firsts for Team Ireland. It will be the first time Ireland has ever competed in Luge and it will be the first time Ireland has had a three-time Winter Olympian. From an overall team perspective, it will be the first time we have held a pre-games camp for the Winter Olympics.

Due to covid restrictions, this could not be in China as originally planned. Instead, the team gathered in Innsbruck to complete some final training and preparation as well as spending time as Team Ireland to continue to build the team culture, before traveling together to the Games.

Personally, it is a huge honour to be able to support this team and I look forward to working with the Team Ireland support team so that Bubba, Elsa, Jack, Seamus, Tess, and Thomas can achieve their highest possible potential. I am certain they will do themselves, their coaches, families and Team Ireland proud.

Go n-éirí libh go leir



Nancy Chillingworth

Team Ireland Chef de Mission Beijing 2022



Human Impact.

As proud official partner to Team Ireland, we know what it takes to make an impact that matters.

We salute the athletes competing in Beijing as they achieve Human Impact: be the true you and never stop growing.

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SCHEDULE OVERVIEW

Date	Time (Irish)	Sport	Event	Athlete
06 Feb	03:00	Alpine Skiing	Downhill	Jack Gower
06 Feb	07:45	Cross-Country Skiing	15km+15km Skiathlon	Thomas Westgaard
07 Feb	02:15	Alpine Skiing	Giant Slalom Run #1	Tess Arbez
07 Feb	05:45	Alpine Skiing	Giant Slalom Run #2	Tess Arbez
07 Feb	11:50	Luge	Run 1	Elsa Desmond
07 Feb	13:30	Luge	Run 2	Elsa Desmond
08 Feb	03:00	Alpine Skiing	Super G	Jack Gower
08 Feb	11:50	Luge	Run 3	Elsa Desmond
08 Feb	13:35	Luge	Run 4	Elsa Desmond
09 Feb	02:15	Alpine Skiing	Slalom Run #1	Tess Arbez
09 Feb	04:30	Snowboard	Halfpipe Qualifying	Seamus O'Connor
09 Feb	05:21	Snowboard	Halfpipe Qualifying	Seamus O'Connor
09 Feb	05:45	Alpine Skiing	Slalom Run #2	Tess Arbez
10 Feb	02:30	Alpine Skiing	Alpine Combined Downhill	Jack Gower
10 Feb	06:15	Alpine Skiing	Alpine Combined Slalom	Jack Gower
11 Feb	01:30	Snowboard	Halfpipe Final (1,2, 3)	Seamus O'Connor
11 Feb	03:00	Alpine Skiing	Super G	Tess Arbez
11 Feb	07:00	Cross country skiing	15km Classic	Thomas Westgaard
13 Feb	02:15	Alpine Skiing	Giant Slalom Run1	Jack Gower
13 Feb	05:45	Alpine Skiing	Giant Slalom Run2	Jack Gower
17 Feb	04:30	Freestyle skiing	Halfpipe Qualifying #1	Brendan Newby
17 Feb	05:21	Freestyle skiing	Halfpipe Qualifying #2	Brendan Newby
19 Feb	01:30	Freestyle skiing	Halfpipe Final (1, 2 & 3)	Brendan Newby
19 Feb	06:00	Cross country skiing	50km	Thomas Westgaard

HISTORY OF TEAM IRELAND AT WINTER OLYMPICS

Team Ireland first competed at the Winter Olympic Games in Albertville, France in 1992, when Ireland entered two bobsleigh teams. Summer Olympians Terry McHugh and Pat McDonagh finished 32nd in the 2 Man event, and Gerry Macken and Malachy Sheridan finished 38th in the same event.

Terry McHugh is the Irish athlete who to date has competed in the most Olympic Games, having competed in four summer games in the Javelin, and two winter games in the bobsleigh.

The first female to compete at the Winter Olympics was Tamsen McGarry in Alpine Skiing, in Salt Lake City in 2002. This was the same Games where Ireland achieved the top result, when Clifton Wrottesley finished just outside the medals in fourth place in the Skeleton.

TEAM IRELAND WINTER OLYMPIANS

1992 Albertville, France (4)

Bobsleigh

Terry McHugh & Pat McDonagh – 2-man Bobsleigh

Gerry Macken & Malachy Sheridan – 2-man Bobsleigh

1998 Nagano, Japan (6)

Pauli Schwarzacher-Joyce – Alpine Skiing

Terry McHugh & Jeff Pamplin – 2-man Bobsleigh (27th)

Peter Donohue & Simon Linscheid – 2-man Bobsleigh

Pamplin, McHugh, Linscheid & Gary Power – 4-man Bobsleigh

2002 Salt Lake City, Utah (6)

Clifton Wrottesley – Skeleton

Pauli Schwarzacher-Joyce – Alpine Skiing

Tamsen McGarry – Alpine Skiing

Peter Donohue & Paul Kiernan – 2-man bobsleigh

Paul O'Connor – Cross-Country Skiing



2006 Turin Sestriere (4)

Thos Foley – Alpine Skiing
Kirsty McGarry – Alpine Skiing
Rory Morrish – Cross-Country Skiing
David Connolly – Skeleton

2010 Vancouver/Whistler (6)

Shane O'Connor – Alpine Skiing
Kirsty McGarry – Alpine Skiing
Aoife Hoey & Claire Bergin – 2-woman Bobsleigh
Peter-James Barron – Cross-Country Skiing
Patrick Shannon – Skeleton

2014 Sochi Russia (5)

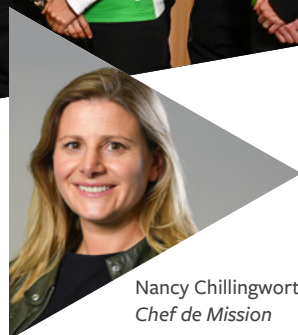
Seamus O'Connor (16) – Snowboard
Conor Lyne – Alpine Skiing
Florence Bell – Alpine Skiing
Jan Rossiter – Cross-Country Skiing
Sean Greenwood – Skeleton

2018 PyeongChang (5)

Tess Arbez – Alpine Skiing
Patrick McMillan – Alpine Skiing
Seamus O'Connor – Halfpipe Snowboard
Brendan Newby – Freestyle Skiing (Halfpipe)
Thomas Maloney Westgaard – Cross Country Skiing

**2022 Beijing (6)**

Tess Arbez – Alpine Skiing
Jack Gower – Alpine Skiing
Elsa Desmond – Luge
Seamus O'Connor – Halfpipe Snowboard
Brendan Newby – Freestyle Skiing (Halfpipe)
Thomas Maloney Westgaard – Cross-Country Skiing



Nancy Chillingworth
Chef de Mission

SUPPORT STAFF

HQ

Nancy Chillingworth - Chef de Mission
Linda O'Reilly - Deputy Chef de Mission
Martin Burke - Sports Director
Ciara McCallion - Head of Performance Support
Dr. Alan Rankin - Chief Medical Officer
Heather Boyle - Communications Manager

Alpine Skiing

Giorgio Marchesini - Snowsports Team Leader
Christian Hillier - Coach
Giorgia Esposito - Coach

Cross Country Skiing

Markus Forsberg - Coach

Freestyle Ski & Snowboard

Ian Burson - Coach

Luge

Connor Campbell - Team Leader/Coach

Pre-Games

Alex Bosci - Camp Manager

TEAM IRELAND DUAL OLYMPIANS

Just 31 Irish athletes have competed for Ireland in the Winter Olympics to date and three of them have done something which is even rarer and particularly historic.

Pat McDonagh, Terry McHugh and Claire Bergin are part of an international sporting elite having competed at a Summer and Winter Olympics, an achievement made all the more remarkable given that Ireland is not an alpine nation.

It is 30 years exactly since McDonagh and McHugh were part of the pioneering Irish bobsledders who were Ireland's first ever Winter Olympians in Albertville in 1992 and Bergin, a bobsledder in 2010, is the only other dual Olympian in Irish sporting history.

DUAL OLYMPIAN: PAT MCDONAGH

Dublin rower Pat, from Inchicore, competed in a coxed four in Moscow 1980 (finished 11th overall) and became a two-time Olympian in Seoul in 1988, in a coxed pair with Frank Mooney, by which time he was already taking a twin-track to Olympic history.

Himself and his Neptune teammate Gerry Macken responded most eagerly when London-Irish businessman Larry Tracey went to Henley in 1986 to recruit Irish rowers for a bobsleigh team.

Andrew Hodges joined the trio in Ischl (Austria) that Winter to do the mandatory week's course needed to get an international bob driver's licence.

"We met a lot of people there because the international federation wanted to open the sport up to a lot of other countries then so it was a great time to be involved but we were initially just going along for the excitement," Pat recalls.



“There was no mention of the Olympics then, Larry was just trying to get a team together with some other Irish guys. He’d already competed in bobsleigh at the British Championships with (rower) Steve Redgrave.”

After competing on the international circuit they were all set to compete in the 1988 Olympics in Calgary but it wasn’t to be and Albertville was their first .

“Rowers weren’t the ideal athletes for bobsled, you really need speed and power over 30m (for the start) which we didn’t have but I met Terry McHugh, the javelin thrower, in Seoul. Terry was the perfect athlete for bobsleigh and had great connections in athletics which brought in some more great athletes.”

That resulted in two Irish bobs – McDonagh (driver) and McHugh (brakeman) as well as Macken and decathlete Malachy Sheridan - becoming Ireland’s first Winter Olympians in 1992, with Garry Power and John Farrelly the travelling reserves. They finished 32nd and 38th respectively from a field of 46 teams.

McDonagh says: “We had one bad run (out of four) that put us back three places but most of it was good and I came back happier than from the Summer Olympics. We were more in control of what we achieved in bobsleigh and we really hadn’t had a huge amount of coaching although we had some from Horst Hörnlein, who was coaching the British team.”

A back injury had already ended his rowing career and while it did not impinge him as a bobsled driver he did not compete again but was very involved, in coaching and leading the Irish Bobsleigh Association, until 2002.

McDonagh gives Larry Tracey, who bankrolled and drove the sport initially, the credit for Irish bobsleigh’s remarkable Olympic history but he too played a seminal role and also encouraged generations of Irish rowers to follow their dream.

Apart from one year, when he worked as a graphic designer, Pat spent his whole career teaching art in Mourne Road Secondary School in Drimnagh and he also played a weekly music gig, at the Dame Tavern, for many years which was a home from home for Irish rowers.

He retired from teaching in 2013, lives in Blanchardstown, plays golf in Baltray and walks his dogs daily around the nearby National Sports Campus.

“Sometimes people say it was a great achievement but it just fell my way and I was one of the lucky ones, it happened without me really trying to be honest.

“I just look back and say it was a really exciting time to be involved in both sports. I made a lot of friends and it was a real blast to carry the flag around in Albertville.”

DUAL OLYMPIAN: TERRY MCHUGH

Thirty years ago Terry McHugh did something unique in Irish sporting history.

He didn't just compete in a Winter and Summer Olympic Games – something that only two other Irish athletes have ever done - he did both in one year.

1992 was the last time that the Summer and Winter Olympics were held in one year.

That he took on and complete this dual challenge with a broken kneecap speaks volumes about the unique physical and mental resilience of an Irish athletics' legend who won the national javelin title 21 times in-a-row (1984-200), made World and European finals and competed for Ireland in six Olympic Games (four Summer, two Winter).

He competed in Olympic javelin in 1988 (22nd), 1992 (27th), 1996 (29th) and 2000 (20th) and his 22-year-old Irish javelin record of 82.75m still stands.

But he was also a bobsleigh pioneer, even though his Winter Olympics debut in Albertville almost ended a month beforehand when he had an accident practising with his partner Pat McDonagh on the ice-rink in Dolphin's Barn.

"We had tyres down one end and used to jump off before the sled hit them. I slipped on our last push and, rather than fall, I jumped on, hunched down and thought I'd absorb it but I was catapulted up into the air and the bar smacked my left knee."

A dash to A&E confirmed his patella was broken in three or four places: "I thought it was over. The chances of being at the Winter Olympics just dissolved in that moment."

But, once the swelling went down, he discovered that he had no pain if he didn't bend his knee below 90 degrees so continued, undeterred and made history in France where the pair finished 32nd and Gerry Macken and Malachy Sheridan were 38th.

McDonagh had recruited him for bobsleigh at the Seoul Olympics in 1988: "We'd been competing (internationally) for a couple of years and the real highlight for me was the day we secured Olympic qualification in Calgary."

Conditions veered dramatically from bright sunshine to -20 that night so the sleds that went down later in the draw went faster, drawing objections from the traditionally strong nations who usually benefitted from the fast early ice.

"Our first run was the best I ever had in a bobsleigh, Pat's driving was flawless. It felt like we were just flying. There was 50-something sleds and we were inside the top 20 but then all the first runs got cancelled. They actually used us as an example to get the whole thing re-started."

The competition didn't finish until 2am but their consistency that night was enough: "We knew we had qualified and were ecstatic."

His bid to repeat it with Garry Power in 1994 ended with the decision not to send a bob to Lillehammer but McHugh was central to recruiting and qualifying a large Irish bobsleigh team for 1998.

He and sprinter Jeff Pamplin were 27th, Pete Donohoe and Simon Linscheid finished 34th and the four (McHugh, Pamplin, Linscheid and Garry Power) were 30th.

"Nagano was a much better experience because we were actually in the athletes' village and competed in four-man as well. As brakeman you have your head down but I remember hearing cheering at every bend, which you never had at a World Cup.

"We had also gone and got our gear embroidered ourselves and I remember seeing the Olympic rings and the Irish logo on the inside of my gloves while I was holding on. You really knew where you were!"

After 1998 he concentrated his energies back on javelin and looks back fondly on his historic dual achievements.

"1992 was the last time anyone could compete in both in the same year because they were breaking the Olympic cycle. To do that was an amazing thing, I can't deny that."

Terry was born in Clonmel and introduced to track and field by the late Sean Naughton in Nenagh before his family moved to Navan.

He now lives in Switzerland, near Lausanne, where he is married with a teenage son. He has been Switzerland's national coach for javelin and discus since 2005 and is also the 'athlete manager' for the annual IAAF meeting in Lucerne, responsible for recruiting all the international entrants.



DUAL OLYMPIAN: CLAIRE BERGIN

Claire Bergin, from Foxrock was a talented sprinter for DSD AC who competed for Ireland in the 2002 World Junior Championships in Jamaica and at European and World Championships plus two World Student Games (2005, 2009).

Frustrated by a succession of set-backs (glandular fever and repetitive injury), she took a complete break from athletics in her final year in DCU but had just returned to the sport when she was approached by Siobhan Hoey in 2008 to try out for the Irish bobsleigh team.

Laois triple-jumpers Siobhan and Aoife Hoey had been trying for a few years to qualify the first Irish women's sled to an Olympic Games.

Siobhan had moved into coaching the team and recruited Bergin and Carlow multi-eventer Leona Byrne to join her sister Aoife.

Within two weeks of getting her first push on the old bob on wheels kept in Santry Stadium they were having their first runs on ice in Austria and then straight into the European circuit.

"Thankfully Aoife was an excellent driver and Ischgl, where we first started, is known as a very slow track but it was a shock to the system," recalls Claire who combined bobsleigh and elite athletics for two and a half years.

"The sled is 200kg+ so carrying that, putting it on and off tracks, pushing it and training - I actually got really strong and didn't suffer from injuries after that."

She was the brakewoman on Ireland's only Olympic two-woman bob who qualified for 2010 in dramatic circumstances.

"We were fighting for one of the last of 20 places and did it, in St Moritz, just a few weeks before the Games. Then, when we got there, the Aussies tried to get us kicked out!"

Australia argued that, as the top side in Oceania, they should have got Ireland's place and appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) during the Games.

They actually got in as a 21st team but not at the expense of Hoey and Bergin who finished 17th with four clean runs, hitting their highest ever speed – 142kph – on the Olympic track.



All of the sliding sports were based in Whistler so the athletes' village was particularly small and tight-knit and sombre after the death, in practice, of Georgian luge competitor Nodar Kumaritashvili. "Our previous experience around Europe was very few people at events but at the Olympic track it was full-on with the cowbells and huge crowds at the start and the finish.

"There was a good lot of Irish support there and I've discovered that a girl I work with now was living in Vancouver at the time and was in the crowd."

She quickly returned to work and exams in Deloitte, (who had given her five months off beforehand for training/competition) and is now their Head of Corporate Responsibility.

"Athletics was my passion. I'd dreamed of being a Summer Olympian, as Irish people do, but never imagined I would be a Winter Olympian first."

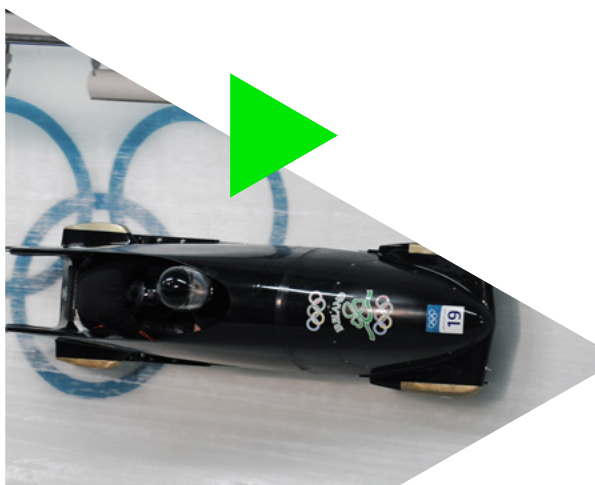
"It was a brilliant time, competing around Europe in a Hiace van with Aoife driving. We had great fun but trained really hard and did so much work off the track too, lifting, travelling, cleaning the sleds. We were our own mechanics."

Less than two years later she became Ireland's only female Summer/Winter Olympian, part of the women's 4x400m squad in London 2021 though she didn't get to race.

But she played a central part in Ireland's qualification as herself, Joanne Cuddihy, Michelle Carey and Marian Heffernan ran a famous Irish record of 3:27.48 at the 2011 World Championships in Daegu to make it.

"That record still stands, we all ran out of our skins that day and never came close to it afterwards. I always knew I wasn't the best of the best but to contribute to a team, and be part of an Olympic Games, was such a great achievement. To have done it twice in two years is something I'm really proud of."

Since then Claire has competed internationally in a third sport – tag rugby. She played in the 2015 and 2018 Tag Rugby World Cups and is still playing for Ireland. She got married in December 2021 and still lives in Dublin.



Going for Gold

As Team Ireland prepares for the Olympic Winter Games 2022, we want to wish them all the luck in the world. The whole country is behind you.

Visit <https://www.allianz.ie/olympic-paralympic-movements/> for more.

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ALPINE SKIING



Schedule

February 6	Men's Downhill
February 7	Women's Giant Slalom
February 8	Men's Super-G
February 9	Women's Slalom
February 10	Men's Combined
February 11	Women's Super-G
February 13	Men's Giant Slalom



The birth of modern alpine (also known as downhill) skiing is often dated to the 1850s when Norwegian legend Sondre Norheim popularised skis with curved sides and bindings with stiff heel bands made of willow. Downhill skiing now provides the marquee events of the Winter Olympics even though cross-country skiing was included first. Today there are six different Olympic alpine events, all of whom involve making turns around gates on marked, pisted courses. Missing a gate results in automatic disqualification.

Downhill is called the Formula One of skiing because it involves the longest and steepest courses with the least gates but still involves sharp turns and big jumps which see athletes reach speeds of close to 100 mph. Super-G is the other big 'speed event' but involves more gates and less dramatic drops.

Slalom and **Giant Slalom** are called the 'technical' events as they involve more gates and turns on shorter courses. Slalom has the most closely spaced gates (between 40 and 75) and Giant Slalom has between 30 to 65 gates.

Alpine Combined is a test of versatility as it involves one round of Downhill (or Super-G) and one of Slalom, with both times combined.

A new **Mixed Team Parallel** event was introduced in 2018. Mixed teams of four race opponents head-to-head on parallel slalom courses to win team points. If both skiers fall or miss a gate, the skier who progressed the farthest wins the point. If teams are drawn 2-2 the team with the lowest combined time of their fastest male and female athlete goes through to the next round.

FORMAT

In speed events athletes get just one run and the fastest wins. In technical events athletes get two runs and their combined time is their final score. As a result, if they don't complete their first run they don't get a second. The same rule applies in alpine 'Combined.' In the second round athletes compete in reverse order on their first round times so the fastest competes last.

OLYMPIC HISTORY

Alpine skiing (for both genders) debuted in Garmisch-Partenkirchen (Germany) in 1936 in a 'combined' format of Downhill and Slalom. Separate Downhill and Slalom events were not introduced until 1948 and Giant Slalom was added in 1952. The Super Giant Slalom joined the programme in 1988 and, 30 years later, the mixed team event was introduced in 2018.

DID YOU KNOW?

When the IOC introduced alpine events in 1936 they banned ski instructors, judging them 'professionals' who contravened their strict amateur rules. As a result Austrian and Swiss skiers largely boycotted the first Winter Olympics though some Austrians competed for Germany.

FUN FACT!

Ester Ledecká of the Czech Republic did something unique at the last Olympics by becoming a champion in two completely different disciplines. She took gold on skis (Super-G) and also won snowboard's Parallel Giant Slalom.

Tess Arbez Alpine skier**Date of Birth:** 01/12/1997**Hometown:** St. Julien, Haute Savoie, France, maternal grandfather Carlow and family in Dublin**Coach:** Team Orsatus, Méribel France[VIEW ONLINE PROFILE](#)

What's seldom is wonderful as Tess Arbez found out in 2020 when she took a year out of competitive skiing to concentrate on her biomedical studies in Geneva.

The talented 24-year-old French-Irish skier was only 20 when she made her Olympic debut in PyeongChang in 2018. She had put her law studies on hold to qualify and then resumed them, via distance learning, but then switched to a more demanding course. "I had started law but I prefer science and medicine and I had to take a full year out of skiing to pass first year as it is a difficult course."

With her passion reignited she returned to the slopes in late 2020 which turned out to be perfectly timed, paradoxically due to the global pandemic. "I was in second year and, with COVID, university was all distance learning and on Zoom which meant I could do the entire ski season. I was maybe the only person who was happy about the Covid situation," Arbez jokes. "I was skiing in the morning and catching up with my lessons in the afternoon so it was a really busy year but I think it was worth it."

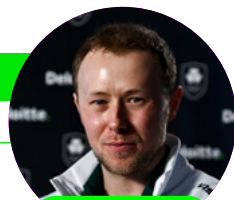
It certainly paid off as she finished 38th in giant slalom at this year's World Championships in Cortina d'Ampezzo (February 2021), her best international result ever. Getting lots of slope time also helped fuel her love for speed and she could be the first Irish woman to race Olympic Super-G in Beijing next February.

In Beijing Arbez is hoping to do even better than on her Olympic debut. "I hope this time I will be more mature and ski better because the first time it's really stressful. I was very nervous. You know the whole country is watching you and your parents are at the bottom waiting for you."

Her maternal grandfather was born in Carlow and lived in Blackrock in Dublin and her mother Marguerite lived in England before her parents moved to France.

Marguerite is a genetic scientist at the same university where Tess now studies "I actually had her as a teacher a few weeks ago, that was funny."



Jack Gower**Alpine skier****Date of Birth:** 26/05/1994**Hometown:** Chichester, paternal grandmother from Dublin and Skibbereen**Coach:** Christian Hillier[VIEW ONLINE PROFILE](#)

Jack Gower's dad Richard had no idea what he let himself in for when his son called him at the start of the 2020-2021 ski season to ask for some help. Covid had made life difficult on the international circuit where teams were tightly constrained to their own bubble and Jack's arrangement to join a training group had suddenly fallen through. "I asked him to come out just to help me one weekend, but it ended up being a whole year.

Gower (27), who switched from GB to represent Ireland last summer, won the world junior title at giant slalom when he was only 16.

Representing Ireland has provided him the free agency to find a new coach and training group ahead of Olympic qualification and he is delighted with his new set-up. He has been reunited with his former coach, Canadian Christian Hillier who helped him win that World Junior title in Crans Montana a decade ago. "We are training with the Swiss Ski Team (second tier) and being able to do that is one of the brilliant things about being Irish."

Home is Chichester, on England's south coast but Gower's late grandmother (her maiden name was Swayne) was born in Dublin and raised in Skibbereen where she met his grandfather. "He was visiting Cork with the British Navy and when they married they got posted to Chile. That's where my dad was born but he and all my uncles and aunts spent their summers in Skibbereen."

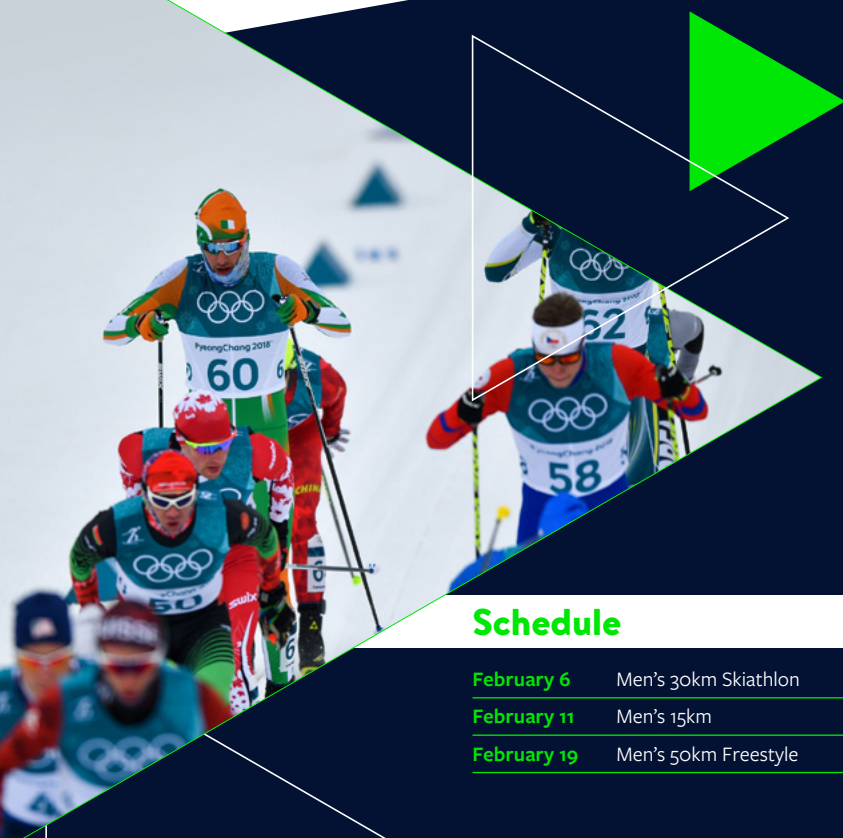
His sporty family includes David Gower, the legendary British cricket player and commentator. "He's my dad's first cousin but we've always called him 'Uncle David.'"

He has been ranked as high as 38th in the world Super-G rankings and has won prestigious titles like the US Nationals and the 2017 South American Cup which he likens to the equivalent of Formula Two "because all the top World Cup skiers use it for pre-season training."

"I love the freedom of going fast, I love competing and we do it in incredibly beautiful places all around the world. I also love thinking about how I can improve. It's a lot of fun."



CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING

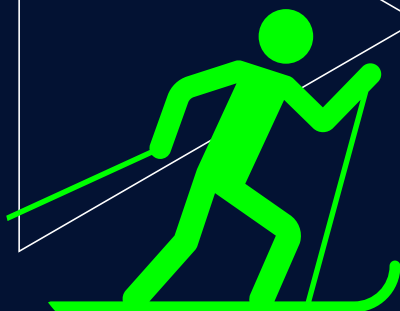


Schedule

February 6 Men's 30km Skiathlon

February 11 Men's 15km

February 19 Men's 50km Freestyle



Cross country skiing is the oldest type of skiing and has its origins in Norway whose athletes are regarded as the best in the world. The word “ski” is a Norwegian word that comes from the Old Norse word “skid”, a split length of wood and cross-country is often described as ‘Nordic skiing.’ What originally started out as a simple means of transport in alpine countries became a competitive sport by the early 1900s but the first FIS Nordic World Championships for men were held in 1925 and since 1954 for women.

The skis used are much longer, narrower and lighter than alpine skis and only the tip of the boot is attached to the bindings.

FORMAT

Races are run over a variety of distances and styles and first over the finish line wins. There are two very different techniques

- **‘Classic’** cross-country is raced in tracks with a striding, parallel motion.
- **‘Freestyle’** is side-to-side skiing, rather like skating. The International Ski Federation (FIS) designates which technique will be used for each event (it can vary with each edition of the Winter Games) and both techniques must be used during the relay.

The 15km+15km skiathlon is also known as the 30km skiathlon. The first 15km is skied in classic style and athletes must then switch to freestyle for the second half of the race.

Most races are mass-starts except for ‘sprints’ which are run in heats. Sprint races are contesting over a maximum distance of 1.8km.

OLYMPIC HISTORY

Cross-country skiing has been a part of the Winter Olympic programme for every Games, beginning with the men’s 50km and 18km competitions in Chamonix (France) in 1924. The first women’s event (the 10 km) was contested in Oslo in 1952. In Beijing there will be 12 events (six each for men and women) and women currently compete at slightly shorter distances.

Men’s events - 15km Classic, 15 km + 15 km, Sprint Freestyle, Team Sprint Classic, 4x10 km Relay and 50 km Mass Start Freestyle

Women’s events - 10km Classic, 7.5 km + 7.5 km Skiathlon, Sprint Freestyle, Team Sprint Classic, 4x5 km Relay and 30 km Mass Start Freestyle

DID YOU KNOW?

Norway’s Johannes Høsflot Klæbo (NOR) is known as the ‘Usain Bolt of Olympic cross-country’. He won triple gold in PyeongChang in 2018 (sprint, team sprint and 4x10km relay) when, aged 21, he became the youngest male skier to win a World Cup, the ‘Tour de Ski’ classic, a World Championship event and an Olympic event.

FUN FACT!

In October 2017 Ireland’s top cross-country skier Thomas Maloney Westgaard and three friends did the Galway Marathon on ‘roller skis’.

Thomas Maloney Westgaard**Cross-country skier****Date of Birth:** 10/10/1995**Hometown:** Trondheim, Norway. Mother from Dunmore, Co. Galway, aunt lives in Oldtown, Ashbourne.**Coach:** Frode Estil, Markus Forsberg[VIEW ONLINE PROFILE](#)

Irish cross-country skier Thomas Maloney Westgaard, who becomes a two-time Olympian when he competes in Beijing, trains up to 200km a week on snowy tracks in Trondheim where there is only six hours of daylight at this time of year. "My longest session would be 5 hours, about 58km. It's a strange thing but when you're in the forest, often just by yourself and a long way from other people, you often start visualising races and start dreaming about how the event will go.

"It can feel like everything else disappears and you only focus for the main thing, which is to be in the best shape for the biggest day. To take the Olympic path is quite a magnificent thing I think and is a huge carrot that makes me focus."

The 26-year-old Irish-Norwegian 15km classic specialist, who grew up on the tiny island of Leka (600 inhabitants), represents Ireland thanks to his mother Celia Maloney from Dunmore Co Galway who moved to Norway 35 years ago after meeting her Norwegian husband on a sun holiday in the Canaries.

In Pyeongchang, what few knew was the emotional turmoil Thomas was suffering at those Olympics because his beloved dad Ove was terminally ill with cancer and passed away, aged only 66, three months later. "I knew things were coming to an end but, he was so focussed on me doing my best and I was really happy that I could finish the races and that he witnessed that. It was huge for both of us.

He was also 25th in the 50km classic at last year's World Championships, a huge achievement, but the 50km in the Olympics, which he will also compete in, is 'freestyle'. Cross Country is raced on tracks (classic style) or skated (freestyle) on open snow and classic is his preferred technique.

He has clearly made huge progress in the past few years and is approaching 2022 with high confidence.

"Back then I was not even ranked in the top 400 in the world, now I am in the top 85 so I am working hard on continuing that progress in the coming months and then hope I will be selected."



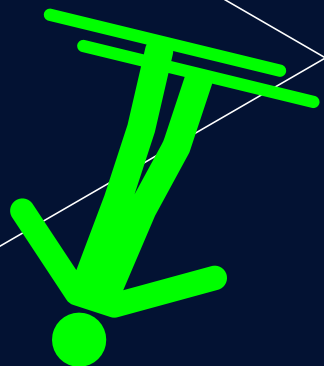
FREESTYLE SKI



Schedule

February 17 Halfpipe Qual (M&W)

February 19 Men's Halfpipe final



Freestyle skiing first emerged in America in the 1960s with the emergence of snow-parks and skiers going off piste to try aerial tricks. Freestyle was recognised as a discipline by the international ski federation (FIS) in 1979 and the first Freestyle World Championships took place in Tignes (France) in 1986. Six freestyle disciplines and most are judged on skill, form and flow.

Aerials – Similar to a vault in gymnastics. Skiers perform as many flips and twists as they can off a jump that is 2-4m high that throws them up to 60ft into the air. They are judged on takeoff (20%), jump form (50%) and landing (30%).

Slopestyle – contested over a much longer course with rails and jumps designed to mimic a snow-park, finishing with several big ramps and jumps.

Halfpipe – the skiing version of halfpipe, contested on the same 22-foot high course, with competitors similarly judged on their flips, tricks and fluency.

Big Air – new to Olympics in 2022. Athletes launch themselves off a very steeply banked and longer ramp so they travel much faster and higher.

Ski Cross – the ski version of ‘boardercross’ which is a race, in groups, across a cross-country course. Despite it being a ‘racing’ event it is considered part of freestyle skiing because it incorporates off-slope, varied terrain.

FORMAT

In judged events the best of two runs counts in qualifying and best of three in the final (top 12). In some events the numbers of competitors reduces during each round of the final. Ski Cross, as a race, is simply first across the line and it is raced, in heats, in a knock-out format to a straight final.

OLYMPIC HISTORY

The first Olympic event was Moguls in Albertville in 1992 and Aerials were included in Lillehammer 1994. Ski Cross made its Olympic debut in Vancouver (2010) and Slopestyle and Halfpipe were added in 2014. Big Air and Mixed Team Aerials (for teams of four) are new in 2022.

DID YOU KNOW?

Snowboarders use air bags (like giant mattresses, on and off slopes) to learn their tricks but freestyle skiers, who have less joint stability on two skis, prefer to perfect theirs using water ramps into specially designed water pools where a burst of air sent up from the bottom is used to lessen the impact of landing.

FUN FACT!

‘Ski ballet’ or acroski - where competitors devised routines to music that lasted 3-5 minutes, - was once a competitive event. It was a demonstration sport at the 1988 and 1992 Olympics but discontinued from 2000.

Brendan Newby**Freestyle halfpipe skier****Date of Birth:** 9/09/1996**Hometown:** Born in Cork, lives in Park City, Utah**Coach:** Ian Burson[VIEW ONLINE
PROFILE](#)

A special childhood memory and the introduction of his sport into the Winter Olympics meant Brendan 'Bubba' Newby (25) achieved his childhood dream in PyeongChang four years ago. "My dad took me to a couple of the events at the 2002 Games in Salt Lake City and since then I always wanted to be an Olympian but the sport I chose (freestyle halfpipe skiing) wasn't in the Olympics. That all changed in 2014 and suddenly it was an option. "So to do it, with my whole family there in PyeongChang, was surreal. It took me a few months to understand it really happened, for it to sink in," he says of finishing 22nd in the halfpipe on his Olympic debut."

Bubba was born in Cork 25 years ago when his father Van, a professor of economics, spent two years teaching in UCC.

"I think I'm skiing a lot better now than I was in Pyeongchang," he says of pulling off his first 'double' in Austria in November. "It's a left double flare, like a double side-flip. It's been in my head, just giving me nightmares, for seven to 10 years and was the most terrifying thing I've ever done so it was nice to finally do it.

"I've also added a really good switch (backwards) Cork Seven which is two spins with a 'cork' so upside-down, and also a right Cork Nine, which is two and a half spins forward with a flip."

Qualifying for Beijing was difficult because he took most of the 2019 season off, not knowing that, due to Covid disruptions, that would backfire on him.

That's just given him an intense qualification period of four back-to-back World Cups in the past month but he finished inside the world's top 30 in each of them and secured his qualification with a 27th in Mammoth on January 8.

"To do a snow sport for a country that doesn't have snow, and to be accepted and supported so well by everyone in 2018, that's a big reason why I decided to go again," he explains.

"If any Irish kids can see me and say 'that's possible' and get into it, that would be the coolest thing in the world for me."



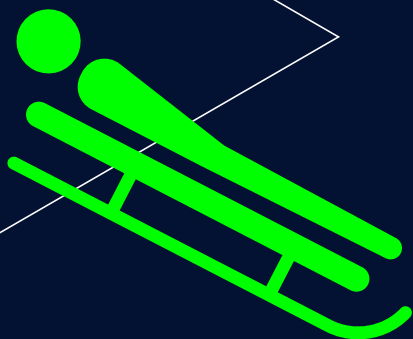
LUGE



Schedule

February 7 Women's Singles Run 1 & 2

February 8 Women's Singles Run 3 & 4



Luge is one of three Olympic sliding sports with Bobsleigh and Skeleton and is the fastest. Individual luges weigh only 21-25kg but lugers can reach speeds that average between 120-145kph. The first recorded use of the term 'luge' dates to 1905 and derives from the Savoy/Swiss dialect of the French word luge, meaning a 'small coasting sled'. It is the name for a type of flat toboggan and also the name for the sport in which athletes lie on their backs on luges and slide feet-first down a winding, banked track of ice.

Luge athletes have two hand straps to hold on to and their gloves have spikes on their fingers in order to give them purchase on the ice at their pushing start. They steer using their calf muscles to flex the sled's runners or by slight shoulder movements to exert pressure on the seat.

Like all sliding sports luge is believed to have originated in the health-spa town of St Moritz, Switzerland, in the mid-to-late 19th century where a local hotelier Caspar Badrutt devised sports to keep guests occupied. Legend has it that luge came about by adapting the delivery boys' sleds for recreation.

The first World Championships for luge were held in Oslo in 1955 – 41 years after the first European Championships.

FORMAT

In Olympic singles each athlete gets four runs over two days. Each is timed down to the thousandth of a second and the athlete with the fastest cumulative time wins. After the first run they are seeded and compete in reverse order, with the fastest last.

Women and doubles start on a lower point of the track than men's single. The doubles competition (which can be a women's or men's pair) has only two runs in a single day and the fastest cumulative time wins.

The team relay involves three sleds per country: a women's single, men's single and a double who compete in that order. As one luge rider finishes they strike an overhead touch pad to let their next team member start.

OLYMPIC HISTORY

Luge was introduced at the 1964 Winter Olympics in Innsbruck with men's singles, women's singles and doubles events.

There are no rules stipulating the gender make-up of doubles teams so technically they can include women and be mixed teams. The team relay was added in Sochi in 2014.

DID YOU KNOW?

Weight affects sliding speed so there are minimum and maximum weight rules in luge, based on the combined weight of the athlete and sled. That's why some athletes add lead weights, inserted into their suits or in a weight belt, to bring them up to the minimum optimal weight.

FUN FACT!

Ireland has previously had four Olympians compete in skeleton (including fourth-placed Clifton Wrottesley in 2002). Elsa Desmond makes history in Beijing as our first Olympic luge competitor and even though she competes in such a high-speed sport she is afraid of heights and flying!

Elsa Desmond**Luge****Date of Birth:** 06/08/1997**Hometown:** Maidenhead UK, connections with Cavan.**Coach:** Connor Campbell (S&C), ice coaches are Maciej and Yuri

Elsa Desmond was in the expensive Swiss ski resort of St Moritz last year when she got the news that she was finally a doctor. That gives the impression of a glamorous lifestyle until she explains the harsh reality of mixing such a demanding career with the sliding sport of luge, especially when you're from a non-alpine country.

For the past five years she has studied medicine at Kings College London while training and competing abroad. "I was always revising, sometimes writing essays in the car between tracks. I'd often have my study cards and revision notes with me in the 'start houses' before races," she reveals.

In her bid to become Ireland's first female Olympian in luge Desmond (24) had arranged to take the past two years out of college to concentrate on qualifying for the 2020 Beijing Olympics but, with Covid's disruption of international sport, decided to keep mixing both. She has been on the international circuit since 2018, competing in the second tier Nations Cup races that directly precede World Cups.

She first saw luge on television in the 2006 Winter Olympics: "I thought it was so cool and when I found there was no woman from Ireland or GB doing I thought 'I could do that!'. It took her 10 years to even get to try it, as a 16-year-old, in Innsbruck.

Ireland's sole luger is part of a group of athletes from smaller nations who train and travel together. The international luge association (FIL) funds their two coaches, they live out of their suitcases and have already raced in Olympic qualifiers in China (Yanqing) and Russia (Sochi) this season.

Desmond's dad Brendan grew up in Fulham but her paternal grandmother is from Ballyjamesduff (Cavan) and her grandfather is from Cork. She represented GB for a year as a junior but then sat out international competition for 12 months to qualify for Ireland and her family has been centrally involved in setting up the Irish Luge Association.

"Being raised by a dad who is Irish in so many ways, I always wanted to represent Ireland and help get more small nations into luge. Now we are growing the sport."



SNOWBOARD



Schedule

February 9	M&W Half-Pipe qualification & W Snowboard Cross
February 11	Men's Half-Pipe Final



The invention of snowboarding is attributed to a Michigan engineer named Sherman Poppen who stuck two skis together and attached a rope at one end for his kids to glide downhill, a device he originally called a 'snurfer'. The International Ski Federation (FIS) introduced snowboarding as a FIS discipline in 1994, helping pave the way for snowboarding's Winter Olympic debut at the Nagano Games in 1998. There are now six Olympic snowboarding disciplines.

Halfpipe is contested on a 22 foot high U-shaped wall. Slopestyle riders perform on a sloping course like a snow-park, starting on metal rails and finishing over three huge ramps. Big Air athletes launch themselves skyward from a steeply banked ramp (like a ski jump). Athletes are judged on their aerial tricks, including clean landings.

Snowboard Cross and **Parallel Giant slalom** are races so first to cross the line wins.

Snowboard Cross (AKA 'boardercross') involves racing down a cross-country course with jumps, drops and corners and is contested in heats of four to six riders.

Mixed Team Snowboard Cross, new for Beijing 2022, is a mixed relay for teams of two. Male athletes will race first and, by crossing the finish line, trigger the starting gate for their female team mates.

FORMAT

Halfpipe, Slopestyle and Big Air competitions are all creative 'judged' events. Athletes get two runs in qualifying (best score counts). The top 12 qualify to the 'best of three runs' finals except for Big Air final where the score is a cumulative of their best two runs.

Parallel Giant slalom has a qualification round where each athlete gets a run on each course and, based on cumulative time, the top 16 go to the elimination rounds which are head-to-head races.

In Snowboard Cross all 32 athletes get a run to decide seedings and are then drawn in knock-out heats through to the final. Higher seeds get first pick on lanes.

OLYMPIC HISTORY

Snowboarding, in the form of Halfpipe and Giant Slalom, was first included in Nagano in 1998. The format of GS was changed to head-to-head, parallel racing in 2002. Snowboard Cross was introduced in 2006, Slopestyle was added in 2014, Big Air was included in 2018 and Mixed team Cross is new this year.

DID YOU KNOW?

The skills (and equipment) in snowboarding disciplines vary hugely so multiple medallists are unusual. Just one snowboarder - America's Jamie Anderson - won two medals in 2018 (Slopestyle gold and Big Air silver).

FUN FACT!

America's Shaun White is the only snowboarder to win three Olympic titles to date. His bid for three halfpipes in-a-row ended with a shock fourth in 2014 but he bounced back with gold in 2018.

Seamus O'Connor**Freestyle halfpipe snowboarder****Date of Birth:** 04/10/1997**Hometown:** Ramona/San Diego, California. Grandmother came from Drogheda/Clogherhead, grandfather came from Dublin**Coach:** The Slovenian National Team. For the Olympics, Ian Burson[VIEW ONLINE PROFILE](#)

SEAMUS O'Connor may only be 24 but the halfpipe snowboarder is already a two-time Olympian and the eminence gris of Irish snow sports. Raised in California, with paternal grandparents from Drogheda and Dublin, he made history in Sochi eight years ago when he wasn't just Ireland's first Olympic snowboarder but also, aged 16, the youngest snowboard competitor, finishing 15th in the halfpipe and 17th in slopestyle.

Despite a bad knee injury in 2016 that lost him a full season he got back in time for PyeongChang in 2018 and, after such disrupted preparation, just concentrated on halfpipe where he finished 18th of a field of 30.

He started university in Westminster College in Salt Lake City four months later and has spent the last four years mixing study and snowboarding in nearby Park City studying a double major in psychology and sports management. He was a snowboarding prodigy who got his first sponsor when he was just 13 and had a lot of pressure to deal with as a teenage athlete. He's had to keep pace in a young sport that has progressed rapidly.

Halfpipers are now doing 1440s (quadruple spins) and even making an Olympics has got harder, with just 24 halfpipe spots available in Beijing (February 4-10), six less than in 2018.

He may still be just a student of sports psychology but the practical insight and experience he's already amassed should prove a huge help to his teammates in China, especially those making their Olympic debut. "My advice to anyone is to try to stay in the moment. The Olympics are overwhelming, eye-opening and non-stop, totally different from anything else you'll ever experience in sport," he explains. "For those few weeks, the entire world is watching you and that matters in how you compete and represent Ireland, in how you conduct yourself at all times.

"You're no longer doing it for yourself, you're doing it for your family and the people of your country back at home. So you have a responsibility to them to be the best that you can be, in competition and out of competition. I don't think there's any other competition in sport that requires that of you."



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To coincide with the thirtieth anniversary of Team Ireland competing in the Winter Olympics, and on the back of the hugely successful Olympic Schools Challenge last summer, the Olympic Federation of Ireland has launched Road to Beijing. The free online schools challenge will run from the 4 – 20 February, the same timeline as the Games in Beijing, and will bring students on an interactive journey from Ireland to China, celebrating winter sports, Team Ireland and the Chinese culture on the way.

Schools can create teams, and as the classes log their physical activity, it is converted to a distance on an interactive map which helps them move from Ireland to Beijing, passing Chamonix and Innsbruck en route, and unlocking videos and activities on the way.

Road to Beijing is part of the OFI's Dare to Believe Programme and aims to open up the world of winter sports to Irish school children as well as teaching them about Team Ireland at the Winter Olympics and celebrating the Chinese culture.





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