

2002 Winter Olympics

The Winter Games returned to North America for the first time in 22 years, when Salt Lake City, Utah won the bid to host the Olympics from Feb. 8 to Feb 24, 2002. Almost 2,400 athletes from 77 countries arrived to compete. The addition of skeleton, for the first time since 1948, and women's 2-person bobsled brought the total events to 78 in seven sports.

Olympic athletes were housed at an Olympic Village at the University of Utah. The opening ceremony celebrated all previous Winter Olympic hosts, and incorporated signs of the September 11 aftermath, including a flag that flew at Ground Zero, and NYPD and FDNY officers in attendance. As these were the first Olympics since the attacks, security was at a higher level than ever before.

Prior to these Games, several International Olympic Committee members were forced to resign, after it was discovered that they accepted bribes to vote for Salt Lake City to be a host in 2002.

Although extreme sports (snowboard, moguls, aerials) were present at previous Olympic Games, they gained the public's attention and emerged as popular events. Various competitors from a record 18 nations earned gold medals (the first for China and Australia). American Vonetta Flowers and Canadian Jarome Iginla became the first black male and female athletes to earn winter gold.

A number of disputes arose during these Games. In pairs figure skating, the French judge's scores were thrown out due to misconduct, and two gold medals were awarded to the Russians and Canadians. Cross-country skiing was marred by doping problems, and the winners of three races were disqualified after blood tests. Russia filed protests and threatened to withdraw.

Meanwhile, South Korea considered boycotting the Olympics when American Apolo Anton Ohno finished second to South Korea's Kim Dong-Sung, but was awarded gold when Dong-Sung was disqualified for cross-skating. Over 16,000 threatening e-mails sent by angry South Koreans flooded the Olympic website server and took nine hours to restore.

The U.S. finished third in the tally with 34 medals (10 gold, 13 silver, 11 bronze). Jill Bakken and Vonetta Flowers won the 2-woman bobsled; Apolo Anton Ohno won the men's 1,500-meter short track speed skate; Jimmy Shea and Tristan Gale won the men and women's skeleton, respectively; Casey FitzRandolph won the men's 500-meter speed skate, Derek Parra won the men's 1,500-meter event, and Chris Witty won the women's 1,000-meter race. In women's singles figure skating, Sarah Hughes earned the gold. Ross Powers and Kelly Clark swept the halfpipe snowboard event.

The 4-man bobsled, and both the men's and women's ice hockey teams place second. Derek Parra earned silver in the men's 5,000-meter speed skate, as did Apolo Anton Ohno in the men's 1,000-meter short track event. The doubles luge team, comprised of Mark Grimmette and Brian Martin, placed second, and Lea Ann Parsely also won silver in the women's skeleton.

In alpine and snowboard events, Bode Miller was awarded silver in the men's combined and giant slalom. Travis Mayer and Shannon Bahrke both placed second in the men's and women's freestyle moguls, as did Joe Pack in the men's freestyle aerials. The final silver medal was given to Danny Kass, in the men's halfpipe snowboard event.

Both Timothy Goebel and Michelle Kwan were given bronze in the men's and women's singles figure skate competitions. The doubles luge team (Clay Ives and Chris

Thorpe) and the 4-man bobsled team also placed third. In snowboard events, Jarret Thomas earned bronze in the halfpipe and Chris Klug came in third in the parallel giant slalom.

The rest of the bronze medals were won in speed skate contests: Rusty Smith in the men's 500-meter short track, Kip Carpenter in the men's 500-meter, Joey Cheek in the men's 1,000-meter, and Jennifer Rodriguez in both the women's 1,000-meter and 1,500-meter speed skate events.

Although Chris Klug was born in Vail and learned to ski at an early age, he moved to Bend, Oregon in 1976 and there began snowboarding and competitive racing as a junior. After placing second in the junior halfpipe competition at the North American Championships, Klug also came in second in the mogul and slalom events at the U.S. Open, all in the same year. He was named the USASA National Amateur Champion in the slalom and super-G in 1989, and shortly afterwards began competing professionally on the PSTA Tour at age 16.

In 1991, Klug became a full-time professional snowboarder, and has been on the World Cup circuit for 11 years. During that time, he has racked up four World Cup victories, three Grand Prix wins, five National titles, a U.S. Open victory, and placed eighth in the 1998 and third in the 2002 Winter Olympics in the parallel giant slalom.

After receiving a life-saving transplant for a rare liver disease in 2000, Klug was back on the podium at the World Cup five months later. He is the first American to compete in a Winter Olympiad with an organ transplant. As the founder of Donor Dudes and the Chris Klug Foundation, he promotes awareness of organ transplants and donors.

Be sure to watch Chris Klug compete at the upcoming 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver. He currently resides in Aspen.

2006 Winter Olympics

Torino, Italy hosted the 2006 Winter Olympics from Feb. 10 to Feb 26, and featured 84 events in seven sports. A record 2,508 athletes and 80 nations arrived to compete. For the first time, live coverage of the Games was available on mobile phones, as well as video coverage in 18 countries on five continents. Neve, a female snowball, and Gliz, a male ice cube, were the 2006 mascots.

In true Olympic spirit, the Norwegian cross-country coach lent a pole to Canadian Sara Renner after she broke one of hers. This generous act allowed Renner to win silver and put Norway out of the medal running. The U.N. Environmental Program also praised Torino for their environmental work.

Doping issues and poor ratings were the primary concerns at these Olympic Games. Italian police raided the Austrian athletes' accommodations in evidence of drug usage. A record 1,129 doping tests were administered. Alpine competitions were delayed due to low visibility and heavy snowfall, and fears of terrorism prompted heavy security. Additionally, the metro began running after a 45-day delay, but didn't reach any of the Olympic venues and stopped at 6 P.M.

Snowboard cross, where competitors race against each other in groups of four on a course with turns, jumps, and difficult terrain, debuted in Torino. This new event was won by American Seth Wescott.

The U.S. went home in second place, with 25 medals (nine gold, nine silver, and 7 bronze). Joey Cheek, Shani Davis, and Chad Hedrick swept the men's 500-, 1,000-, and 5,000-meter speed skate events, respectively. Apolo Anton Ohno won the men's 500-meter

short track speed skate. In the men's combined, Ted Ligety was given gold, as was Julia Manuso in the women's giant slalom. Both Shaun White and Hannah Teter won the men's and women's halfpipe snowboard competition.

The U.S. 2-woman bobsled (Shauna Rohbock and Valerie Fleming) and pairs ice dance competition (Tanith Belbin and Benjamin Agosto) both came in second. Sasha Cohen was also awarded silver for her performance in the ladies singles figure skate. Silver medals were given to Joey Cheek in the men's 1,000-meter, Shani Davis in the men's 1,500-meter, and Chad Hedrick in the men's 10,000-meter speed skate races. Lindsey Jacobellis won silver in the women's snowboard cross, while Danny Kass and Gretchen Bleiler both came in second in the men's and women's halfpipe snowboard.

Bronze medals were given to the women's ice hockey team, men's curling team, and the men's 5,000-meter short track speed skate team (comprised of Alex Izykowski, JP Kepa, Apolo Anton Ohno, and Rusty Smith). Apolo Anton Ohno also came in third in the 1,000-meter short track individual event, as did Chad Hedrick in the 1,500-meter speed skate. Meanwhile, Toby Dawson earned bronze in the men's freestyle moguls and Rosey Fletcher placed third in the women's parallel giant slalom snowboard event.

Toby Dawson, also known as "Awesome Dawson," was born as Kim Bong-Seok in Pusan, South Korea. At age three, he went missing in a crowded marketplace and, since his parents were unable to locate him in any orphanages, was adopted by ski instructors in Vail. After learning to ski at age four, Dawson switched from ski racing to freestyle when he was 13. He made the U.S. Ski Team and debuted at the 1999 World Cup, where he placed fifth in moguls.

Dawson remained on the World Cup moguls tour, claiming a U.S. title in dual moguls in 2002, winning two bronze medals at the 2003 World Championships, three World Cup victories in 2004, and, in 2005, won the dual moguls World Championships event.

Although he had been actively searching for his parents, and made several trips to South Korea to trace his heritage, Dawson was only reunited with his father after the 2006 Winter Olympics. His father came forward after friends and family called to say the famous skier looked like him, and DNA evidence proved he was Dawson's biological father.

Dawson was married to Leah Halmi in Korea in May 2007, and intends to start a foundation to prevent missing child situations similar to his own. He currently volunteers with the Korea Heritage Camp for Adoptive Families, and has appeared in four Warren Miller films.

Other local Olympians include Lindsey Vonn and Gretchen Bleiler. Vonn, although born in St. Paul, MN, moved to Vail in the late 1990's, and quickly became one of the best U.S. skiers. She placed sixth in the combined at the 2002 Olympics, then crashed during a downhill run in the 2006 Games. After being evacuated by helicopter, Vonn returned the next day to compete and finished eighth.

Bleiler, a member of the U.S. Snowboarding Team, began snowboarding at age 11 and turned professional in 1996. She was the first woman to land a Crippler 540 in competition, and won more halfpipe competitions in 2003, '05, and '06 than any other female snowboarder. Bleiler is currently a resident of Aspen, and is involved in several environmental organizations.

Watch for both Gretchen Bleiler and Lindsey Vonn in the upcoming 2010 Vancouver Olympics!

