

Sports

Olympic underdogs are memorable

Not every athlete in the Olympic Games will take home a medal — that is given. Not everyone is a Pirmin Zurbriggen, and it's a good thing. The 1988 Winter Olympics has a number of athletes who are in Calgary to compete but have virtually no chance of medal or finishing near the top of the list.



Cray Pixley
Sports viewpoint

These unlikely Olympians capture the attention and hearts of the world through their competitive spirit and skill at being in the games. They probably won't be setting any world or Olympic records but they may be remembered more than the silver medalists. One of these Olympians has already caught my eye.

On Sunday afternoon the 70-meter ski-jumping competition took place. The 70-meter event was to be the one-man-show of Finland's flamboyant Matti Nykanen.

Nykanen is the darling of ski-jumping and was a sure thing for the 70-meter gold medal. He didn't let anyone down and easily came away with the gold.

He effortlessly flew 89.5 meters on both jumps to blow away his competition.

But on that Sunday in my eyes and in those of many other people around the world, there was another more memorable ski-jumper.

Michael "Eddie" Edwards, the lone and first ever ski-jumper from Great Britain, also was jumping in the 70-meter event.

Edwards was not the best or even the second best jumper that day.

In fact, Edwards finished dead last in a field of 58 jumpers.

The important thing was not where Edwards finished but that he competed at all.

Edwards who has been ski-jumping for two years was far more exciting than the Finnish prima donna Nykanen. After being asked who his

coach was Edwards replied, "everybody".

"Everybody coaches me, mostly the Canadians and the Americans because we don't have a language barrier," he grinned.

ABC televised the waiting room for the ski-jumpers and Edwards was jumping around practicing his take-off. All the other competitors were lounging about eyeing him strangely.

Before the competition, Edwards signed autographs and chatted to fans wearing "I Love Eddie Edwards" shirts.

"I was jealous because I wanted an 'I Love Eddie Edwards' shirt, too."

While waiting to go down the jump, Edwards waved at the camera with a big grin plastered across his face and then put his goggles down over his glasses.

Edwards' crash helmet was labeled with the word "Eagle".

He did look like an eagle with his arms slightly flapping in the air.

His form was shaky but he made it down all the same.

Edwards completed both jumps to a deafening roar of applause and the

whopping distance of 55.0 meters.

During his jumps even the television commentators got into the excitement by screaming that he may have hit the 60.0 meter mark.

Some of Edwards' behavior may sound arrogant but it was just the opposite. He was a sincere guy with an infectious enthusiasm for his sport.

His presence in the 70-meter event added something for the common man.

He was just a regular guy not the usual world-class athlete.

That's swell.

In Olympic days to come more unlikely Olympians will get a share of the spotlight.

For the first time ever, Jamaica will have a bobsled team.

The men and their sled dubbed "Ragamuffin" will compete with the Soviets, the East Germans and West Germans among other snowbound teams.

It is very doubtful they will be medal winners.

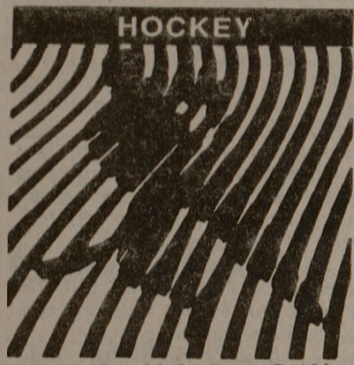
The Jamaican bobsled team may match the thrill of the "Eddie Edwards" story and in this way, they can't lose.

Soviets too strong for upstart US hockey team

CALGARY, Alberta (AP) — The U.S. hockey team ran out of miracles Wednesday night, losing 7-5 to the Soviet Union in their first Winter Olympic meeting since the stunning American victory at the 1980 Lake Placid Games.

This one fell just short for the United States, which rallied from a 2-1 deficit to 6-5 but couldn't get even, despite outshooting the high-powered Soviets 12-4 in the final period.

The loss left the Americans on the brink of elimination from making the medals round, with a 1-2 record and having to beat Norway and West Germany to even have a chance. The defending gold medalist Soviets are



Graphic by Susan C. Akin

now 3-0 and virtually assured a spot in the medals round.

The top three teams from each of

the two pools make the medals round.

With Vaicheslev Fetisov, their all-star defenseman from their main Red Army club, leading the way with two goals and three assists, the Soviets continued the domination of Americans in international play.

The victory was the sixth in eight meetings with the United States in Olympic play since the Soviets played their first Olympic game in 1956. The only time the Americans have beaten the Soviets in the Olympics came in the gold-medal winning years of 1960 and 1980, the last time a dramatic 4-3 victory that was coined the "Miracle on Ice" at Lake Placid, N.Y.

The Soviets have never lost to the Americans at the World Championships, holding a 22-0 advantage.

The Soviets looked every bit the team that U.S. Coach Dave Peterson called the strongest in the Winter Olympics.

Fetisov set up Sergei Makarov at 7:23 and then Alexei Kasatonov at 9:41 to help the Soviets grab a 2-0 lead after one period.

Fetisov also set up Kasatonov's second goal at 8:58 of the second period and later scored himself at 18:46 to give the Soviets a 6-2 lead after two periods. Both of Kasatonov's goals and the one by Fetisov came on the power play.

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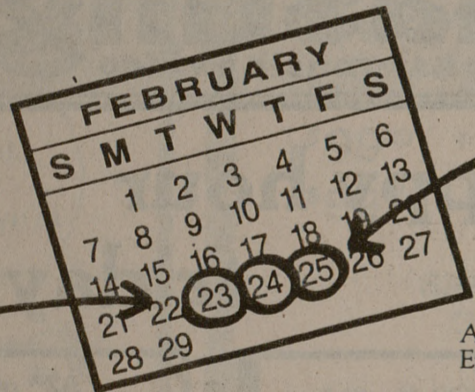
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2nd gold medal slips away from Swiss skier

CALGARY, Alberta (AP) — Pirmin Zurbriggen lost his shot at a second gold medal in a tangle of skis and poles.

Unrelenting winds that reached 50 mph wrought havoc on the Olympic schedule, delaying the double-gold quest of Matti Nykanen, the "Flying Finn." Nykanen was going after an unprecedented second victory in ski jumping when the 90-meter team event was postponed until Thursday.

The final two runs of the women's luge also were postponed.

The Soviet Union picked up two more medals — a silver and bronze from its women's cross-country team — to run its count to nine. That's six more than Finland, Switzerland and the Netherlands.

The United States still has just one medal, a pairs figure skating bronze by Jill Watson and Peter Oppegard that could have been a silver except for Watson's costly pratfall. Speed skater Eric Flaim almost got the United States its second medal in the 5,000-meter speed skating event. He missed the bronze by 1.17 seconds, finishing fourth.

Zurbriggen had only to finish the second run of a slalom race, and he would have earned his second gold, in a new Olympic event called the combined, a downhill-slalom hybrid. Instead, he fell when he hooked a gate with his right ski, and that ended any talk of an Alpine sweep.

"I felt I was skiing well, and I was very surprised, to see the gates between my skis," the 25-year-old Swiss said. "I am disappointed, but the downhill was my main goal."

Zurbriggen, one of the most versatile skiers in the world, won the traditional downhill gold medal on Monday, then finished

first in the combined downhill Tuesday. And talk was: Is this the next Jean-Claude Killy? Can Zurbriggen sweep all the Alpine events, as Killy did in 1968 and as Toni Sailer did in 1956?

He provided the answer Wednesday, but with the addition of two more Alpine events, Zurbriggen still could win four golds, one more than either Killy or Sailer. Standing in his way will be the Italian, Alberto Tomba, the best slalom skier in the world and the man battling Zurbriggen for the World Cup title.

Zurbriggen was tied for sixth after the first run of the slalom, and that would have been plenty to win the combined gold. He passed the midway point of the second run with the fifth-best time, but with 25 seconds gone in the run, he hooked his right ski around a gate.

His left leg slid out as he careened through another gate. Separately trying to regain his balance, he fell, crashed through several more gates and rolled over on his back. He got up almost immediately, bent over against his poles and stared at the ground, beaten not by the competition but by the mountain.

Marjo Matikainen of Finland and Vida Ventense of the Soviet Union became the Games' first double medalists.

Matikainen, a bronze medalist at 10 kilometers, won the women's 5-kilometer cross-country race, beating Tamara Tokhonova of the Soviet Union by a 1.3 seconds. Ventense, who won the 10 kilometers, was third.

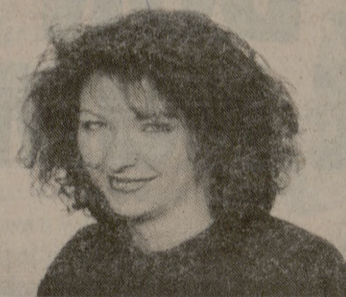
At the speed skating oval, Tomas Gustafson of Sweden won the gold medal at 5,000 meters. Leo Visser of the Netherlands was second, and countryman Gerard Kemkers won the bronze.

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