
6 Minute English 13 February 2014

Technology at the Winter Olympics

NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Rob: Hello I'm Rob. Welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm joined today by Finn. Hello Finn.

Finn: Hi Rob.

Rob: Today we're talking about the biggest sporting event that's taking place at the moment – the Winter Olympics at Sochi in Russia.

Finn: Yes, it's the 22nd Winter Games to take place but these ones are the most expensive ever – they are reported to have cost around £32 billion.

Rob: And it was quite a surprise when the Games were awarded to Sochi back in 2007 because the city is better known for palm trees than for ski slopes. But a lot of new technology has gone into making this competition possible.

Finn: Yes and a lot of technology has been used to make this year's sportsmen and sportswomen faster than ever – and that's what we'll be discussing today, as well as explaining some sports-related vocabulary.

Rob: But first Finn, let's see if you can '**go for gold**' and get this question right. One winter sport event in this Olympics is the Biathlon. It involves competitors doing two things but what are they? Are they:

- a) Cross-country skiing and rifle shooting
- b) Downhill skiing and rifle shooting
- c) Cross-country skiing and swimming

Finn: I'm going to say cross-country skiing and rifle shooting, that's a).

Rob: OK, we'll find out if you are right or wrong later on. So Finn, are you a fan of the Winter Olympics?

Finn: I must say I prefer the summer Olympics but I do enjoy watching the skiing. What about you?

Rob: I particularly enjoy watching the bobsleigh racing – the speed is incredible and it looks like a really fun thing to do.

Finn: And dangerous!

Rob: Yes. But of course, the **athletes** need a lot of skill to complete the course in the fastest time and, of course, win the race.

Finn: Yes, they need to be very fit but technology can also **give them a helping hand**. Behind the scenes, computer **modelling** helps to design the best wind-resistant bobsleighs - and the best techniques for the athletes to use.

Rob: This is true for another Olympic sport, speed skating. When there's less than a second between gold and silver medal, clothing can make a big difference – a newly-designed speed-skating suit, introduced in 2002, helped many skaters beat their **personal best**.

Finn: Yes, they improved their own fastest time. So materials used in the design of sportswear can give competitors **an advantage** – and another factor is the technology in the equipment they use.

Rob: Such as in skiing, where skis are manufactured – or made – with materials that increase **durability** - that's staying in good condition for a long time despite constant use – and stability – keeping skis upright – and of course, speed.

Finn: Yes, and there are different designs for different types of skiing: some skis are narrow and light to use for cross-country skiing while others are short with curved edges, to allow skiers to tackle sharp turns in a **slalom** race.

Rob: A slalom involves lots of tight turns. I tried that when I went skiing once and it was quite tricky, especially at speed, which is why I took my time, doing a **snow-plough** around every pole.

Finn: OK, so no gold medal for you! Ski design is constantly evolving – or improving – which makes ski events some of the most varied and exciting of the Winter Games.

Rob: There are other types of skiing in the Winter Olympics such as, ski jumping, **freestyle** skiing, skiing **moguls** and Nordic skiing. All these need one crucial – or essential thing:

Finn: Skis?

Rob: I was thinking more of snow! But as Sochi is known for its subtropical climate, using natural snow is a little bit unreliable. That's why loads of **artificial** – or fake snow is being made.

Finn: Yes, and snow guns are being used to do this. They eject cooled water and compressed air to make man-made snow.

Rob: But the problem with this is it uses large quantities of water so it depletes – or uses up – local resources. It's believed the snowmaking system at Sochi could empty an Olympic-sized swimming pool in less than one hour.

Finn: Of course ice is another essential ingredient for many of the winter games. Sports such as: curling, figure skating, ice hockey, luge and skeleton – that's where competitors, known as sliders, **hurtle** head first down the 1.5km course on a sled not much bigger than a tea-tray.

Rob: That really does sound dangerous! And what about the biathlon Finn? I asked you earlier which two sports that competition involves.

Finn: I really had no idea but I said a) cross-country skiing and rifle shooting.

Rob: Well, you're quite knowledgeable actually, because the answer is a). It's cross-country skiing and rifle shooting. Did you know, the biathlon is also the sweatiest sport at the Winter Olympics? Male athletes typically produce 2.3 litres (or 4 pints) of perspiration in the 20km race.

Finn: Four pints? Wow! Well, it makes me sweat just thinking about doing something like that.

Rob: That's it for today, we hope you've enjoyed listening. Please join us again soon for another 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. Bye.

Finn: Bye.