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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

WINTER OLYMPICS SUPPLEMENT

## Lose the Luge?

A total of 98 events were contested at the Olympic Games, and avid viewer Emily Beers wonders if the herd should be thinned to focus on quality rather than quantity.



### Beers and Shots

By Emily Beers

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*Biathlon goes 10 for 10: cardiorespiratory endurance, stamina, strength, speed, power, flexibility, coordination, balance, agility and accuracy.*

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We've all had that Winter Olympics moment: you're watching the high-flying aerials or a game-winning shot in overtime. Then coverage shifts to curling, and the wind is knocked out of your sails as you start looking for something else to watch.

Some sports just don't warrant a flower at the metaphorical Olympic rose ceremony. It's nothing personal. Curling is indeed a fine pastime, hobby or leisure activity, especially if yelling at a slow-moving rock is your thing. But an Olympic sport? That's simply hard to support.

Curling feels like a step away from watching your grandparents play shuffleboard at the local community center. While a productive activity for the 70-plus crowd, an Olympic sport it is not.

And if we're going to call out curling, it's worth taking a look at the rest of the Olympic lineup for a few disciplines we could do without in four years' time.

### **Olympic Requirements**

Defining sport is actually quite challenging, and it's easy to criticize almost any sport for its shortcomings. CrossFit—a relatively new sport—certainly has its share of critics even though it's supported by a concise definition of fitness.

Whatever your definition, few would disagree that sports should require incredible athletic ability and mental toughness—two features that are sometimes lacking in at least a handful of today's Olympic sports.

Becoming an Olympic sport is a laborious process in which the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has the final decision. To be considered for inclusion, a winter sport must be practiced in a large number of countries, but to a certain degree it comes down to politics: The sport must have an organized international federation in place, and representatives of the sport must put forth a strong campaign to convince the IOC to include the sport at the Olympics.

At times it seems almost any sport—even shuffleboard on ice and glorified tobogganing—can become part of the Olympic Games, though we've dodged some bullets when "demonstration sports" such as speed skiing (1992) and ski ballet (1988 and 1992) were not invited to become an official part of the Games.

But still, there are some duds, and I think it's time the IOC takes into account the real physical, mental and logistical components of each sport before the run is set for the 2018 Games in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

### **Proposed Requirements for Olympic Sports**

#### **Seven-of-10 Rule**

I propose that a minimum of seven out of CrossFit's 10 general physical skills—cardiorespiratory endurance, stamina, strength, speed, power, flexibility, coordination, balance, agility and accuracy—should be required in all Olympic sports.

#### **Quads Before Lungs**

The ratio of yelling to physical exertion must favor physical exertion. This would eliminate curling. During a curling match, the skip has a greater chance of losing his or her voice than of pulling a quad.

#### **Mandatory Use of Posterior Chain**

The majority of the sport should be done in some sort of recognized athletic stance. Sitting, let alone lying down, while performing the sport should be kept to a minimum, thus eliminating all sliding sports—bobsled, luge, skeleton—among others. Perhaps these sports could be trimmed so the competition involves only the start, in which the athletes are working hard, thereby eliminating the portions mainly showcasing the power of gravity.

#### **No Pity Sports**

Sports created to help less gifted athletes should be eliminated. Ice dance is a prime example. Ice dancers pretty much all started off as figure skaters, but when they realized they didn't have the athleticism—the speed, power or jumping ability—necessary to be elite figure skaters, they tried their hand at ice dance, in which they can "twizzle" their way to the Olympic Games.

#### **No Made-Up Sports or Events**

In Sochi, team figure skating was added for the first time, and it's essentially just a way to provide another medal opportunity for figure skaters. The two-man luge is another perfect example; it's the same as the regular luge event, except one man gets squished. And team luge relay? Really?

### Objectivity Only

The winner should not be decided based on judges' opinions. Again, ice dance comes to mind. Even the expert commentators on national television admitted the gold medal in Sochi was a toss-up between Americans Charlie White and Meryl Davis and Canadians Scott Moir and Tessa Virtue. In the end, Davis and White were essentially awarded the gold based on little more than personal preference.

Judging in figure skating has been questioned on many occasions. One famous scandal marred the pairs competition at the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics. Russians Anton Sikharulidze and Elena Berezhnaya were originally awarded the gold, while Canadians Jamie Salé and David Pelletier won the silver, but once a judging conspiracy was exposed, both pairs were eventually—and awkwardly—given gold medals.

The scoring system was revamped after 2002, but the French paper *L'Equipe* still published allegations of collusion between the Russian and American judges in Sochi to trade gold in the team and pairs competitions for gold in the ice-dance event. After the women's event was won by Russia's Adelina Sotnikova and not Korea's Yuna

Kim, more than 2 million people signed a petition calling for an investigation into the judging. The number was still climbing at press time.

Bottom line: too many figure-skating scandals have scarred too many Olympic Games. And subjective judging always leaves room for controversy and questions in any sport.

### Comparative Advantage

In economics, countries should trade where they have a comparative advantage, and the same principle should be employed when considering sports. In other words, if one gender is more entertaining to watch than the other gender, the less crowd-pleasing gender should be removed from the playing field. This would, in my opinion, eliminate women's hockey and men's figure skating.

While this might seem like a sexist suggestion, the idea here is simply to maximize entertainment value—and both men's and women's sports are on the chopping block.

Comparative advantage can also be applied to different events. After allegations of sexism when women's ski jumping was left out of the 2010 Games, the sport was contested by females at the Olympics for the first time in



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*Emily Beers might give curling a no-rep as a sport, but at least Wang Bingyu definitely hits depth in this mid-game squat.*

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**A 2002 Olympics judging fiasco created this awkward photo in which everybody is a winner.**

Sochi; however, the better decision might have been to eliminate ski jumping all together due to the comparative advantage held by freestyle skiing. Aerial skiers—who flip and turn in the air—can do everything ski jumpers can do, and they do so in a much more entertaining manner.

### What's In and What's Out

Due to violations of the criteria above, the sports to be eliminated from the Winter Olympic Games are as follows:

1. Curling
2. Two-man luge
3. Ice dance

On the flip side, the best sports of the Winter Olympic Games are as follows:

1. Downhill skiing—With its raw athleticism and pure speed, downhill skiing is both easy to understand and easy to appreciate—as well as easy to measure. A classic Olympic sport, downhill skiing is beautiful in its simplicity and isn't scarred by subjective and complicated scoring systems that govern many of the newer judged ski and snowboard events, including halfpipe and slopestyle.
2. Men's hockey—Hockey requires almost all of the 10 general physical skills. Athletes are fast, strong, powerful and highly skilled, and the nature of the sport requires athletes to think and react at high speed. Not to mention, hockey is one of the most watched sports at every Winter Olympic Games.

3. Biathlon—Biathlon is perhaps the most underappreciated Winter Olympics sport. With cross-country skiing and shooting components, it's a beautiful physical and mental challenge. The precision of shooting a rifle is balanced by the extreme physical demands of cross-country skiing, and there's nothing subjective about the sport. You either hit the targets or you don't, and the first one across the line wins. Biathlon, despite its low profile, is the quiet king of the Winter Olympic Games.



### About the Author

*Emily Beers is a CrossFit Journal staff writer and editor. She competed in the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games on CrossFit Vancouver's team, and she finished third at the Canada West Regional in 2012. In 2013, she finished second in the Open in Canada West.*