



ESL Podcast 395 – Watching the Olympic Games

GLOSSARY

opening ceremony – a special event that begins the Olympics or a conference or sports competition, often with music, dancing, and other shows

* Did you see those beautiful fireworks at the opening ceremony last year?

Olympic Village – a group of buildings where all of the athletes stay during the Olympics

* Where is the U.S. team staying within the Olympic Village?

torch – a long stick that has fire at one end to make light and heat

* The Olympic torch is lit in Greece and then carried around the world to many different countries.

Olympics – international sports competitions held every four years in a different place each time

* The Olympics were held in Los Angeles in 1984.

track and field – a group of sports like running, throwing, and jumping

* - Did you do track and field when you were in high school?

- Yes, the long jump was my favorite.

gymnastics – a sport with a lot of movements that require strength, flexibility, and balance

* She is very good at standing on her hands, but she isn't very good at other types of gymnastics.

athlete – a person who plays a sport and is in good physical condition

* Tricia is a great athlete who runs, swims, and bikes almost every day.

flag bearer – a person who carries his or her country's flag, usually in a parade

* I think the parade is almost here! Look, I can see the flag bearer coming.

gold/silver/bronze – types of metal that are given to winners, usually worn around their neck, representing first/second/third place in a competition

* Kenny received the gold when he beat all the other runners in last week's race.

medalist – a person who receives a small piece of metal, often worn around the neck, because he or she did well in a competition, usually getting first, second, or third place

* Two of the medalists at the science fair were from our school, but neither of them got first place.



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competitor – a person who participates in a sports competition and is trying to win it

* How many competitors are there in ice skating this year?

accolade – award and honor; praise; good things that are said about someone or given to someone because other people like and admire him or her

* Pierre received a lot of accolades at work when his idea made the company more than a million dollars.

caliber – the quality of something; the level of something; how good something is

* Yale, Stanford, and Princeton attract many high-caliber students.

to trade places with (someone) – to exchange roles with another person; to live someone else's life

* If you could trade places with anyone in history, who would it be and why?

event – an individual competition within a larger sports competition

* Do you know who won the 300-meter event?

qualifying heat – a sports competition to decide which of the people are good and fast enough to participate in the real competition

* Valto needs to get a lot of sleep tonight because he has to win the qualifying heat tomorrow.

to cheer on – to support a team or person and hope that it, he, or she will win

* We're cheering on the Florida Panthers because we went to school there.

can't hurt – a phrase used to mean that something cannot do anything harmful and may even be helpful, so there's no reason not to do it

* I don't really believe in horoscopes, but reading them can't hurt.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Which medalist is the best athlete?
 - a) The gold medalist.
 - b) The silver medalist.
 - c) The bronze medalist.

2. What does Jesse mean by saying, “I’d trade places with her any day”?
 - a) He’d like to move to that athlete’s country.
 - b) He’d like to exchange his place for hers.
 - c) He’d like to be that athlete.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

torch

The word “torch,” in this podcast, means a long stick that has fire at one end to make light and heat: “When their flashlight stopped working, they made a torch so that they could see in the dark.” The phrase “to carry the torch for (something)” means to be a leader of something, especially related to an important social issue: “That organization carries the torch for human rights.” The phrase “to be the torch bearer for (something)” has the same meaning: “She is the torch bearer for making improvements within the company.” Finally, as a verb, “to torch” means to light a building or group of buildings on fire so that they burn down and are destroyed: “Many people died when the soldiers torched the village.”

to cheer on

In this podcast, the phrase “to cheer on” means to support a team or person and hope that it, he, or she will win: “We’re going to sit outside during the marathon and cheer on the runners.” The phrase “to cheer (someone) up” means to do or say something to help another person feel better or happier: “Yoko has been very sad since her cat died, so I’m going to buy her some flowers to try to cheer her up.” Finally, the phrase “three cheers for (someone)” is shouted by a group to show that the group is very pleased with what another person has done: “Three cheers for Michael! We never could have finished that report on time without him.”



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CULTURE NOTE

The Special Olympics are “similar” to (almost the same as) the regular Olympics in that it is a series of sports events held every four years. However, the competitors are different. In the Special Olympics, the competitors are people who have “disabilities,” meaning that they have a physical or “mental” (intellectual) problem that has slowed their development and growth and makes it more difficult for them to complete common daily “tasks” (things that need to be done).

The Special Olympics were “founded” (created) in 1968 as a way to help people with disabilities feel more “confident” (sure that one can do something) about themselves and learn to interact with other people socially. More than 180 countries send more than 2.5 million competitors with disabilities to the Special Olympics.

In the Special Olympics, people with disabilities compete in many different sports, including basketball, cycling, gymnastics, tennis, volleyball, skiing, and much, much more. The athletes compete against others who have “approximately” (about) the same abilities that they do. In other words, people with “severe” (very strong) disabilities compete against each other, but not against people with less serious disabilities.

Many people think that watching the Special Olympics is “inspirational” (giving people new and exciting ideas about what they can do and how they should live their lives), because they see people “overcoming” (moving beyond and not being stopped by something) their disabilities and trying to do the best they can. In the Special Olympics, the “emphasis” (the important part of something) is not on winning, but rather on doing one’s best, as shown in the “oath” (a serious and official statement) taken by all the participants: “Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be ‘brave’ (courageous) in the ‘attempt’ (try).”

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – a; 2 – c



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 395: Watching the Olympic Games.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 395. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California, home of the 1932 and 1984 Summer Olympic Games.

Visit our website at eslpod.com to download a Learning Guide for this episode that contains all of the vocabulary, definitions, sample sentences, cultural notes, additional definitions, and a complete transcript of this episode.

We're going to talk today about some vocabulary related to the Olympic Games, in particular the Summer Olympics, since this episode is being released in the summer of 2008 when the Olympic Games will be held in Beijing, China. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Mary Lou: Am I too late for the opening ceremony?

Jesse: No, it's just starting. The runner is just coming into Olympic Village with the torch.

Mary Lou: Oh, this is so exciting! I love the summer Olympics. Track and field, gymnastics, swimming – I can't wait!

Jesse: Oh, here come the athletes from each country, with their flag bearer in front. Look at all those gold, silver, and bronze medalists.

Mary Lou: Isn't it funny that that country only has one competitor?

Jesse: No way! Can you imagine the accolades you'd get as the only athlete from your country that's of Olympic caliber? I'd trade places with her any day.

Mary Lou: This schedule says that the track and field events begin tomorrow.

Jesse: Yeah, but those are just the qualifying heats. The real races don't start for three days. What's that?



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Mary Lou: My flag. I'm cheering on the U.S. team.

Jesse: From the living room?

Mary Lou: Sure, why not? It can't hurt, can it?

[end of dialogue]

The dialogue between Mary Lou and Jesse begins by Mary Lou asking, "Am I too late for the opening ceremony?" The "opening ceremony" is the special event that begins the Olympics. It could also be a term we use to describe the beginning of a conference or a sports competition – a large sports competition, where they have music and dancing and other entertainment. That is what the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games is like; it's a big celebration. It usually takes place in a large stadium or arena, with thousands and thousands of people there, and the athletes from each country come into the stadium and walk around the stadium.

Jesse says, "No, it's just starting. The runner is just coming into Olympic Village with the torch." The "Olympic Village" is a group of buildings, usually close to the main sites of the Olympics in a city, where the athletes stay. I'm not sure if the torch runner actually goes into the Olympic Village, but the Olympic Village is the place where the athletes sleep; it has places for them. The "torch" (torch) is a long stick that has fire at one end. "Torch" has a couple of different meanings in English; take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations. But it is traditional for the opening ceremony to begin with a runner from the country where the Games are being held – the "host" country – will come in and run around the stadium with the official Olympic torch.

Mary Lou says, "Oh, this is so exciting! I love the summer Olympics," the international sports competition, you probably know, held every four years. "Track and field, gymnastics, swimming – I can't wait!" "Track and field" are sports such as running, throwing, jumping – it's a general term we give to all of those competitions. "Gymnastics" refers to those sports that involve things like the uneven bars – the parallel bars – where you see men and women in a gymnasium, and they are performing usually individual exercises. Sometimes they jump up and down, they flip their bodies; there are many different parts of the gymnastics competition. Perhaps one of the most famous "gymnasts," which is what we call someone who participates in gymnastics, was the Romanian, Nadia Comaneci. That was many years ago.



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Jesse says, “Oh, here come the athletes from each country.” The people who play a sport are called “athletes.” The athletes have their flag bearer in front. The “flag bearer” (bearer) is the person in the opening ceremonies that carries his or her country’s flag, usually as part of a parade. So, there are flag bearers in the opening ceremony; there are gold, silver, and bronze medalists. Now, since this is the opening ceremony, of course we don’t have any gold, silver, and bronze medalists yet for the Games; there could be some there from previous Olympic Games. A “medalist” is someone who wins a medal, and in every sport there are three medals. The first place is the gold medal, the second place is the silver medal, and the third place is the bronze medal. So, at the end of the Games each country will, we hope, have some medalists – some gold, some silver, and some bronze.

Mary Lou says, “Isn’t it funny that that country has only one competitor?” Sometimes there are smaller countries that don’t have very many athletes in the Olympic Games; they may have just one or two. Other large countries will have dozens of athletes. A “competitor” is a person who is participating in a sports competition. In this case, it’s the same as an athlete.

Jesse says, “No way! Can you imagine the accolades you’d get as the only athlete from your country that’s of Olympic caliber?” “Accolades” is praise, good things that people say about you, honors and awards. It’s a more formal term. Jesse is saying, wow, if you were the only person from your country participating in the Olympics, you would get a lot of honors – a lot of praise. He says that you have to be of Olympic caliber. “Caliber” (caliber) refers to the quality of something – how good something is. Harvard and Yale are high-caliber universities – very high quality. So to be an Olympic athlete means you have to have a high caliber. In this case, Jesse says “Olympic caliber,” meaning very high, very good.

He says, “I’d trade places with her any day.” To “trade places with someone” means to exchange roles with another person, to live someone else’s life, to do what someone else is doing. “Trade places” is also used to mean, for example, if I’m sitting in this chair and you’re sitting in another chair, I sit in your chair and you sit in my chair, we trade places – to move to someone else’s place and they move to your place. Here, he’s talking about having that role, being able to be that person.

Mary Lou says, “This schedule says that the track and field events begin tomorrow.” An “event” is an individual competition within a larger sports competition. So in the Olympic Games, they have individual events that are all part of the Olympic Games – the larger competition.



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Jesse says, “Yeah, but those are just the qualifying heats. The real races don’t start for three days.” Because there are so many countries that want to participate in each sport, they have what are called “qualifying heats.” These are competitions to decide who is good enough to go to the next level, and only those that are winning or do very well in the qualifying heats will go on to the final competition, where they decide the gold, silver, and bronze medalists. That’s what Jesse means by the “real races,” the ones where someone is given a medal.

Jesse then asks, “What’s that?” Mary Lou says, “My flag. I’m cheering on the U.S. team.” To “cheer on” someone is a phrasal verb meaning to support a team or a person, hoping that he, or she, or they, will win something. “I’m cheering on the Los Angeles Dodgers” – I want that baseball team to win. This verb has a couple of different meanings; take a look at the Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

Jesse is surprised; he says, “From the living room?” meaning she is sitting in her living room watching the opening ceremonies on television, and she has her flag – her country’s flag, the U.S. flag. She’s cheering them on from her living room. Mary Lou says, “Why not? It can’t hurt, can it?” The expression “it can’t hurt” means that it may not do any good, but it won’t do any harm; there’s no reason not to do it. For example, if you ask me, “Is it going to help me to drink some beer or wine while I’m listening to ESL Podcast? Will that help my English?” and I say, “Well, it can’t hurt!” It may not help, but it won’t hurt you either – unless you drink too much wine and beer!

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

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Jesse: From the living room?

Mary Lou: Sure, why not? It can't hurt, can it?

[end of dialogue]

The script for this episode was written by Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on ESL Podcast.

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