

## Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

### Episode 27: The Olympics

(Brief intro music)

Leah: Hello, and welcome to Not Your Mother's Library, a readers' advisory podcast from the Oak Creek Public Library. I'm Leah.

Rachel: And I'm Rachel.

Leah: Because it occurs only once every four years, we want to take this opportunity to talk about the Olympics. I pulled some statistics from sportingnews.com, and as of 8:45 this morning, the medal counts for Team USA are as follows. I guess I should clarify, um, that today is July 26th. A...as of 8:45 July 26th, our medal counts for Team USA are seven gold, three silver, four bronze, bringing us to 14 overall.

Rachel: That sounds pretty good.

Leah: It does, right?

Rachel: Yeah!

Leah: But just remember, the Olympic games go through August 8th, so there's...there won't be final medal counts until then, so there are plenty more opportunities for Team USA to snag some medals. One that I thought was just really outstanding was that Anastasija won the first women's gold in Taekwondo that's ever happened for Team USA.

Rachel: Wow, that's really cool.

Leah: Uh, it's super cool—history-making!

Rachel: Yeah.

Leah: Uh, so jumping into...into the topic, um, when Rachel and I decided that our next topic would be the Olympics, I had one immediate thought that jumped to my mind. It took me back to 2004 when I was a senior in high school. Two local guys—twins named Morgan and Paul Hamm—were going to the Olympics. It was big news in Waukesha, WI. It's big news anywhere! What a cool thing to happen to our hometown. And I guess it just really stuck with me. If you're wondering, they were competing in gymnastics. Both were on the U.S. men's team, which took a silver medal. Paul also won gold in the men's all around, and a silver in the high bar. Pretty amazing.

Rachel: Absolutely.

Leah: This does lead me into my first book pick, named "Going for Wisconsin Gold" by Jessie Garcia. This is a book put out by the Wisconsin Historical Press in 2016 and profiles 22 different

Olympians from Wisconsin. One of which is Paul Hamm; he's on page 197. There's also this really cool list in the book about Olympians with a "Wisconsin connection," meaning they either were born, grew up, went to school, or trained extensively in WI. It has 173 folks listed, and yes, I did take the time to count that personally.

Rachel: (laughs)

Leah: Now, keep in mind that this book is from 2016, so any folks that may have competed since then won't be named. I found a Journal Sentinel article from July 14th, 2021 listing 32 folks that have ties to the upcoming Olympics. Pretty cool. The book kicks off with a short history of the Olympics, and then dives right into a mostly chronological layout. The first Olympian profiled is Alvin Kraenzlein way back to the games in 1900 in Paris—the second in modern history...the first being in 1896 in Athens. What I found absolutely fascinating about reading Kraenzlein's history was that his coach Mike Murphy developed with him the crouching starting position for sprinters that is still used today. That's so cool! I'll admit, even when I participated in track and field—shotput and discus, baby!

Rachel: (laughs)

Leah: I never once considered the techniques...where came from. Just accepted that that was how you started a race. Kraenzlein is also credited with perfecting the "lead leg" technique for hurdling that you see athletes use. He's also, according to the book, the first person to take four individual Olympic gold medals and remains the only person to do so in track and field. And before you say "What about Jesse Owens?" well, he did win four golds, but one was in a team event. Still, Jesse Owens's life and Olympic journey are well worth learning about. He's not in this book as he's not tied to Wisconsin, but there are definitely some great ones about him. In any case, "Going for Wisconsin Gold" is well worth a read. Each profile is really well done and will keep you interested—at least, they did for me.

Rachel: So, you guys might be hard-pressed to believe this, but I myself am not super familiar with Olympics or sports—

Leah: (laughs) Weird!

Rachel: (laughs) —either as a participant or as a spectator. Ah, even though I am more a video game person, I do totally understand how sports can captivate an audience. Most people become fans of certain sports and teams when they're still young, usually due to being brought up by their family and friends to appreciate it. If you are looking to add fuel to the flames of your own children's growing interest, then I suggest "Everything Sports: All the Photos, Facts, and Fun to Make You Jump!" by Eric Zweig. This book is great to flip through, with lots of glossy pictures that even had the likes of me going, "Wow, I kind of want to try that!" despite the fact that I have very little muscle definition. The sports covered range from orienteering and rock climbing to basketball and hockey. Also fencing, gymnastics—you name it! There are two separate sections I want to highlight. Firstly, a chapter titled "Go for the Gold" that explains

what different medals and trophies mean. It features some of the world's most accomplished athletes, too, including swimmer Michael Phelps who currently holds the world record for most Olympic gold medals won. It's something like over 20 at this point, which is almost unbelievable.

Leah: Mmhm.

Rachel: The second chapter I want to draw your attention to is all about "The Olympics." It makes for a decent introduction to the event itself. To this end, another great launch pad is the book "What Are the Summer Olympics?" by Gail Herman. This is part of the "Who Was? What Was? Where Is?" series for children in grades one through eight that seeks to explain the fundamentals of famous figures, events, and landmarks. If you frequent the library, you would probably recognize the cover art, because the subjects are always drawn in caricature. Anyway, "What Are the Summer Olympics?" is fairly self-explanatory, and it has some nice little illustrations that will help keep younger audiences interested.

Leah: Okay, the next book I selected in one that has been enormously popular but would be worth another read if you've read it already. It's "The Boys in the Boat" by Daniel James Brown. It's in my favorite genre, which is narrative non-fiction. That basically means it reads like an engaging novel but is all true history. This book tells the story of the rowing team from UW Washington which represented the United States in the 1936 Olympics in Nazi Germany. The main character followed is team member Joe Rantz, but each member of the team gets some time in the spotlight describing how they survived the Great Depression and how they earned their way into school. The book talks about their incredible journey to train and stay afloat—get it?

Rachel: I do! (laughs)

Leah: —in school to keep training. Alongside their stories, Brown also details the preparations that Nazi Germany went to show off Germany to the world. The book finishes with a description of the final race in which the teams wins gold.

Rachel: Woo! Coming at you with even more children's literature recommendations to pique your kids' curiosity, let's start with "Hour of the Olympics" from Mary Osborne's "Magic Tree House" series. Here's the blurb: "Their magic tree house takes Jack and Annie back to retrieve a lost story in ancient Greece, where they witness the original Olympic games and are surprised to find what girls of the time were not allowed to do." Although I personally have never read a single installment of this series, I do remember it being the most popular thing ever when I was in the third grade. Osborne's work is still cherished by many, and this title in particular actually has a non-fiction companion piece written by the same author. "Ancient Greece and the Olympics" is a "research guide" designed to supplement the original material. It is really helpful for understanding the wider history surrounding the games, explores where they originated in ancient Greek culture, and paints a clearer picture of traditional sports such as javelin and discus throwing. This book even includes a bit about the modern Olympics toward the end,

which nicely rounds out the whole experience. To compliment these reading materials, check out a copy of “The Summer Olympics” by Bob Knotts. This title includes information on Olympic ideals, torch bearing, as well as the impact different countries have had upon the games themselves. There is a super interesting timeline that shows some of the summer Olympic events alongside the years in which they first appeared in the modern games. For instance, they added table tennis in 1988, which is something that seems utterly appropriate for that decade.

Leah: Yes.

Rachel: I’m picturing sweatbands and legwarmers.

Leah: Yes.

Rachel: (laughs)

Leah: Another book that talks about the 1936 Olympics, and Jesse Owens in specific, is called “Triumph” by Jeremy Schaap. It’s 236 pages of a deep dive in Owens’s life, who was the winner of four gold medals, as I previously mentioned. One of the reviews on the book does a really great job of summing it up, so I’ll let the reviewer, John Feinstein, tell you all about it: “It can be argued that there has never been a sports story more important socially or politically than Jesse Owens’s performance seventy years ago in Berlin. Jeremy Schaap has done a remarkable job of tackling a complex subject and bringing it to life in a book well worth reading.” End quote.

Rachel: (laughs) It does sound good.

Leah: Jesse Owens won four gold medals but got no recognition from President Roosevelt. Hitler, however, shook Owens’s hand. Despite being an incredible athlete, the minute he took any endorsement deals to make some money, United States athletic officials were furious and withdrew his amateur status, which ended his career. Just imagine the heights he could have reached if he’d been allowed to devote all of his energy towards peak performance instead of balancing work, school, and training. Anyways, the book is a great profile of Owens, and if you’re interested in piqued we have it here at Oak Creek. We also have a copy of “Race” which is a movie that came out in 2016 all about Jesse Owens.

Rachel: Alrighty, I need to do myself some justice and talk about graphic novels!

Leah: (laughs)

Rachel: I found a couple in Oak Creek Library’s collection that are bound to interest younger readers. In “Geronimo Stilton Saves the Olympics,” the eponymous character fights against his arch enemies, the ‘Pirate Cats’—”

Leah: Ooh.

Rachel: “—who have discovered a way to travel back in time and change history.” They end up at the first modern Olympics way back in 1894 in order to stir up some trouble. Geronimo and

his friends have their tiny little anthropomorphic hands full! If you want more, try “The Smurf Olympics” wherein Hefty Smurf helps to organize the first-ever Smurf-themed Olympic games. However, his fellow Smurfs don’t really want to participate. Weakling Smurf, however, absolutely wants to win. Man, apparently there is a Smurf for everything.

Leah: Mmhm.

Rachel: Also, please don’t make me say that word every again. That was six times in less than thirty seconds, and I am at capacity.

Leah: I won’t.

Rachel: Thank you. Moving swiftly on, my final recommendation is a fun chapter book for those in grades six through eight. On top of being an adventure, “Mr. Lemoncello’s Library Olympics” —

Leah: “Library!?”

Rachel: (laughs) Indeed! —by Chris Grabenstein is full of mysteries, clues, and puzzles. I obviously like it because it features the library as a main subject.

Leah: Clearly, I do, too.

Rachel: (laughs) After flipping through this book, I can honestly say that I think most readers will be intrigued by the codes and puzzles sprinkled throughout. Also, it’s fun to say “Lemoncello.”

Leah: It is. Lemoncello.

Rachel: Lemoncello.

Leah: All right. Finally, I want to briefly mention a book named “Foxcatcher” by Mark Schultz and David Thomas. This one is a bit different from the others, as it’s not just about an Olympic journey but also about a murder that took place. If you’re into true crime and the Olympics, this would be a fantastic read for you. There’s also a movie by the same name that came out in 2015, starring Mark Ruffalo and Channing Tatum. If you’d prefer to watch something, instead. The main gist of the story is that Mark and David Schultz are brothers who both go on to be Olympic gold-medal athletes in men’s wrestling. David Schultz went to work for John du Pont—think ‘du Pont chemicals’ and ‘insane wealth’—

Rachel: Sure.

Leah: —at a wrestling facility. In 1996, du Pont shot and murdered David Schultz.

Rachel: Whoa!

Leah: The book chronicles Mark and David’s early life as told by Mark, our book’s author, as well as their Olympic journey and what led up to the murder. Du Pont was convicted of third-degree murder and did die in prison in 2010, if you’re interested in that outcome.

Rachel: And with that murder in mind, we are closing out the episode! Remember to check the show notes for a complete list of all the reading materials we just talked about. You can also subscribe and rate the podcast if you like what you hear. Reach us through the Oak Creek Public Library website or Facebook page by sending a message to @OakCreekLibrary. Until next time, happy reading.

Leah and Rachel: Bye!

(Brief outro music)

Leah: Owens's?

Rachel: Owens's, yeah. Or just Owens. I've heard it both ways.

Leah: (sighs) Okay.

Rachel: (laughs) Super helpful, I know.