

The Olympics trace their origin back to 776 BC in Olympia, Greece. The first celebration honored Zeus and featured only one athletic contest, a 600-foot run. Adding competitions along the way, the festival continued for almost twelve centuries. After a 1,503 year break, the modern Olympics debuted in Athens in 1896. Feeling a bit left out, snow and ice enthusiasts put together the first Winter Olympics in Chamonix in 1924.



A lot has changed since then. Sixteen nations competed in Chamonix; there will be ninety-two at PyeongChang. Nigeria is making history with two firsts at the Winter Olympics. Competing in the bobsled and skeleton, the team of three will be both the first Nigerians and the first women to represent Africa at a Winter Olympics. Ecuador, Eritrea, Kosovo, Malaysia and Singapore will also compete in their first Winter Games. Meanwhile, a doping scandal has banned Russia. Clean athletes can participate under the generic Olympic flag.

There will be a few new events at the PyeongChang Games taking it over the top with more than 100 medal events. When it comes to winter medals, you can't beat Norway. In spite of its small population, just over five million people, little Norway has earned 329 winter medals. That's more than any other country.

The estimated cost for the PyeongChang Games is a hefty \$12.9 billion. Yes, that's billion with a B. As impressive as the number is, it doesn't compare to the cost of the Sochi Olympics, a whopping \$51 billion. Only one city has had the audacity to reject the honor of hosting the Olympics. Denver won the bid for the 1976 Winter Games but, after looking at the price tag, the people of Colorado voted it down.

Athletes from the divided peninsula of North and South Korea will join forces for a joint Olympic team. They will march together under a unified flag in the opening ceremony. Athletes from both sides of the demilitarized zone will train together. The women's hockey team will take it one step further and send a unified team out onto the ice. It is not the first time an Olympics has united a divided country. West and East Germany competed together in 1956, 1960 and 1964.

Fielding the largest winter team ever, the US is sending 242 Olympians to South Korea. These athletes hail from coast to coast and thirty-one different states. Four are from our very own New Hampshire. Four more are immigrants from Ghana, South Korea, England and Canada. The youngest member of Team USA is Vincent Zhou, one of six seventeen year olds and a figure skater. The oldest US Olympian, Brian Gionta, is still playing hockey at thirty-nine. Speaking of hockey, anyone who remembers the miracle on ice at Lake Placid in 1980, stay tuned. The National Hockey League will not break for the games so NHL players will not skate at PyeongChang.

The Olympics can be a family affair. Seven sets of US siblings will compete in PyeongChang. Twins Jocelyne and Monique Lamoureux play hockey for the US while the Brandt sisters are on different teams. Hannah is a forward for the US and Marissa plays defense for the unified Korean team. Adopted and brought to the US at four months, Marissa will play under her birth name Park Yoon-Jung. Seven more athletes are following their parent's footsteps, including skiing great Barbara Cochran's son Ryan. Then there is the Caldwell cross-country ski dynasty. Patrick will be at PyeongChang, his father competed in 1972, 1976, 1980 and 1984 and grandfather in 1952.

Enjoy the games! Wishing all of our athletes the joy of victory and bon appétit!

Quick Braised Asian Vegetables

A great side dish for your Olympics viewing party. Enjoy!

Serves 8

Vegetable oil

8-12 ounces mushrooms, trimmed and sliced

Sea salt and freshly ground pepper

1/2 onion, finely chopped

1 carrot, peeled and finely chopped

1-inch piece ginger, peeled and finely chopped

2 cloves garlic, minced

1 tablespoon or to taste sriracha

2 tablespoons rice vinegar

2 tablespoons soy sauce

1 tablespoon fish sauce

1 cup chicken stock

About 1 1/2 pounds bok choy, trimmed and roughly chopped

1 red bell pepper, cut in match sticks

1 tablespoon sesame oil

1-2 scallions, thinly sliced

Cilantro leaves

Lightly coat a large wok or skillet with vegetable oil and heat over medium-high. Add the mushrooms, season with salt and pepper and sauté until lightly browned. Remove from the pan and reserve.

Add a little more oil to the skillet. Add the onion and carrot and sauté until the onion is translucent. Add the ginger, garlic and sriracha and cook for 2 minutes more. Add the vinegar, soy sauce, fish sauce and chicken stock, bring to a simmer, reduce the heat and simmer for 10-15 minutes.

Raise the heat to medium-high, return the mushrooms to the pan, add the bok choy and bell pepper and toss to combine. Stirring frequently, cook until the vegetable are tender, 3-5 minutes.

Drizzle with sesame oil and toss to combine, garnish with scallions and cilantro and serve immediately.

