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For the winter-weary, there are a few sure signs that we've hit midpoint. The Super Bowl, America's version of the gladiator games, has been won and lost. Punxsutawney Phil has popped out of his burrow. People in Pennsylvania may swear by Phil but his comings and goings are hardly relevant in northern New England. Whether he sees his shadow or not, my neighborhood will see at least eight more weeks of winter. Probably more. Only the most freakishly short New Hampshire winter is over by mid-March.

If you think you've already had more than enough snow and ice, don't despair. The winter Olympics are back. What better way to survive another two months (or more) of winter than watching our champions skate, ski, bob and board? Well, maybe a little skiing, sledding or ice dancing of your own.

To get you in the mood, here are a few Winter Olympic fun facts:

By now the athletes are unpacked and settling in at Sochi. While I've never been to Sochi, the first Winter Olympic Games were held ninety years ago at one of my favorite ski resorts, Chamonix, France. Sixteen nations came together to compete in sixteen events at the first Games. For the 2014 games, athletes from eighty-five countries will compete in ninety-eight events across a multitude of sports, including Biathlon, Bobsleigh, Curling, Ice Hockey, Luge, Ice Skating, Skiing and Snowboarding. Twelve new events will debut in Sochi, including women's ski jumping!

The opening ceremony at Chamonix was little more than a few speeches, a parade of athletes and an impromptu skating party on the rink. Except for the parade of nations, the ceremonies at Sochi will have little in common with Chamonix. A grand spectacle will be televised around the world. There were 5,000 on-lookers for the opening day fun at Chamonix and, all told, 10,000 people paid to watch the various athletic contests. The potential television audience for Sochi is close to three billion, yes, billion.

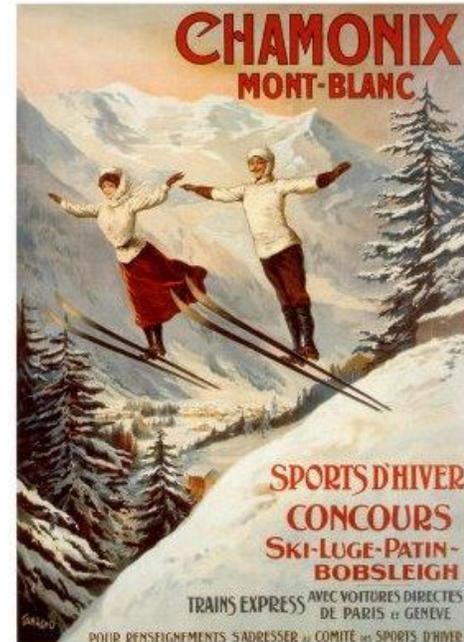
Norway is the longtime winter Olympic medals champ. They led the 1924 Olympics with seventeen medals and enter the twenty-second Games with a grand total of 313. The United States is second with 274. However, the population of the United States is well over 300 million while Norway has just over 5 million hardy souls!

Norwegian cross-country skier, Bjorn Daehlie has the highest individual tally of Winter Games' medals – eight gold and four silver. Speed skater Apolo Ohno holds the American medal record with two gold, two silver and four bronze.

Hurdler Lolo Jones missed her chance at medals in Beijing and London. She's now trying her luck at the bobsled. Only four athletes, American Eddie Eagan among them, have won medals at both the Winter and Summer games. Eagan alone has won gold in both, for boxing and the bobsled.

So, for the next few weeks, take a trip to Russia from the comfort of your living room sofa. Put the vodka on ice, whip up a batch of blinis and enjoy the games!

Bon appétit!



Savory Blinis

With the Olympics in Russia, what could be better than blinis with caviar or smoked salmon and tiny glasses of icy vodka while you watch the opening ceremonies? Enjoy!

Makes about 24 small pancakes

1/2 cup buckwheat flour
1/2 cup all-purpose flour
Grated zest of 1 lemon
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon kosher salt
2 tablespoons sour cream
3/4 cup milk
1 large egg
About 4 tablespoons butter

Garnish: smoked salmon, caviar, sour cream, lemon slices, capers and/or chives



Put the flours, zest of 1/2 lemon, baking powder and salt in a bowl and whisk until combined.

Melt 1 tablespoon butter, put it in a small bowl with the sour cream and egg and whisk to combine. Whisking constantly, slowly add the milk and whisk to combine.

Add the liquid ingredients to the dry and whisk to combine.

Melt 1 tablespoon butter in a large nonstick skillet over medium-low heat. Drop heaping tablespoons of batter onto the skillet and cook until bubbles form on the surface, about 2 minutes. Flip and cook until golden and cooked through, 1-2 minutes more. Transfer to a plate and cover to keep warm.

Repeat until all the batter has been used up.

Garnish the blinis with smoked salmon, caviar, sour cream, capers, lemon slices and/or chives and serve.