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Illinois Wesleyan Student Witnesses Olympics During Study
Abroad in Europe
March 7, 2006

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – On Feb. 24, Illinois Wesleyan junior Laurel Higgins was sitting on top of an Italian Alp watching Olympic bobsledding, eating a hot dog and using a pile of snow as a beverage coozie.

“It doesn’t get much better than that,” she said. Higgins, who is majoring in International Business at Illinois Wesleyan University, attended the Olympics during a semester studying abroad in Dijon, France. She found the events a relieving opportunity to express her national identity.

Higgins thought the international fans shared pride in their teams, but not a “throw it in your face” kind of pride.

“I found that it was completely acceptable by all the fans to be mildly obnoxious when your country’s team was (competing)--for example, the Dutch wore orange bib overalls, orange hats and cowbells around their waist that they would jingle every time their team (competed).

“I wouldn’t say it is a bonding experience between different fans, but I think it does bring people together who appreciate talent of any nationality. It was nice to feel safe and at peace with showing national pride and allow others to do the same. Personally, I loved the games because it was the first time in six weeks that I felt like I could blatantly be American. For weeks, I had been told to try to blend in (wear dark shoes, use the language, don’t wear sweatshirts, etc.) but at the Olympics I felt good about chanting ‘U.S.A’ and not caring what the people around me thought. It was a sort of a healthy release of pride for all of us.”

Higgins, of Mahomet, Ill., is a graduate of Mahomet-Seymour High School.

Although television viewership for the Olympics was less in the United States compared to previous years, in Europe, Higgins found enthusiasm for the events ran strong.

“It truly was an amazing experience,” she said.



Laurel Higgins watched bobsledding events at the Olympics.