

NBC Sports Group Media Conference

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Mike Tirico

Molly Solomon

Press Conference



MIKE TIRICO: Now time for a virtual conversation about a little more of what's ahead with the Olympics, and for that we are joined by Molly Solomon and Gary Zenkel, who is in Beijing already, and we'll get to Gary about the logistics and business and other parts of this endeavor, but we'll start with Molly Solomon, executive producer, production of our NBC Sports coverage of these Olympic Games. Molly, for the second time in seven months, here we go again with the Olympics.

MOLLY SOLOMON: Mike, we said Tokyo was going to be one of the most challenging Olympics of our lifetime. I retract that. Beijing is unique in this regard, and we're going to talk about that today, but I wanted to start by making sure we don't forget some of the amazing storylines that are -- that we expect to happen in Beijing.

First, we really got four once-in-a-generation athletes competing live in primetime because of the Asian time difference. We are 13 hours ahead in Beijing. First of all, you have Mikaela Shiffrin, who is expected to compete in as many as five events. And really with a couple of medals, she'll really cement her Olympic legacy.

We also have figure skater Nathan Chen who has been virtually unbeatable since the last Olympics. And the question is, can he shake off that disastrous short program in 2018 and finally win the Gold Medal.

And I get really excited about halfpipe. Chloe Kim is defending her halfpipe Gold Medal, and she is the hottest athlete on the planet right now.

And then there is Shaun White at age 35 who is coming back for one final Olympic appearance, and he is going to be competing against kids half his age.

So really excited to watch all of them, really special athletes. And I know, Mike, you and I really get intrigued by the USA-Canadian women's hockey rivalry. I think it's one of the best in all of sports.

MIKE TIRICO: It has turned up that way almost every time that the Gold Medal has been contested in women's ice hockey, and even when they meet in between Olympic Games. It usually ends up USA-Canada, third period, tight game. And we look forward to some dramatic conclusion that could very well happen in Beijing.

Where will people be able to watch this? Take us across the layout in the family of networks.

MOLLY SOLOMON: It's a little simpler than the Summer because the Winter Olympics is a little smaller, a little more intimate, but here is the plan. NBC will have afternoon, daily coverage, and then we'll have primetime in Prime Plus, and that will be live across the country, live in all time zones, similar to what we started in PyeongChang and continued in Tokyo.

Now, with NBC Sports Network shuttering, USA Network becomes our primary cable home. So 24/7 long-form live Olympic coverage. And CNBC always has its traditional post-market curling show, plus we'll also have some primetime additional curling and international hockey.

And on streaming, Peacock simply has it all. So we have eliminated the confusion, and they have the full complement of the Olympics, and you'll hear more on that later in this presentation. Plus we always have live event streaming on nbcolympics.com in the Sports App where you can see everything.

And I think it's always important, Mike, in the Winter Olympics, there's a change, right. The primetime show starts on Thursday night, February 3rd, the night before the Opening Ceremony, and we are going to have the live team figure skating event.

MIKE TIRICO: And we'll talk more about the Opening Ceremony in a minute. We'll get back to, you mentioned Peacock and the various platforms and networks people will be able to watch the coverage. Any improvements or any learnings that have come from Tokyo that will be applied to the viewership experience for viewers at home? Football coaches at home during the Beijing games?

MOLLY SOLOMON: You know, the upside of getting to do an Olympics a couple of months after another is that you



immediately get to, you know, really listen to the viewer feedback and our own critique of ourselves and our presentation and we really focused on making the thousands of hours we produce more intuitive, findable, how can you make it easier for the viewer to find what they are looking for. We are doing that in three ways.

First we mention Peacock, eliminating the confusion, every event on Peacock.

Second we have really enhanced our customization of the schedule on NBCOlympics.com. So you can find anything you want, linear, digital or streaming by going there, and finally we are going to double-down on on-screen execution. So more information for the viewer. Studio segments will have tickers reminding you what's coming up.

So we'll use different graphical executions to ensure information is out there so everybody knows what's coming up and where to find what they want.

MIKE TIRICO: Every Olympics seems to advance the ball a little bit on how sports are broadcast, so it's always a fun thing for all of us to find out and ask, what's new in the coverage.

MOLLY SOLOMON: This is the fun part, right. We are deploying the most production technology ever at a Winter Olympics, including figure skating where we have added major elements.

As you know, Mike, the skaters on the men's and women's side are continuing to elevate the sport with quadruple jumps so we really wanted to make sure that we are better explaining, you know, those amazing feats. So we have added four super slow-mo cameras, one in each corner of the rink. That brings us up to 22 cameras of figure skating, and that is really going to help the viewer better understand the rotations on those jumps that determine their scores.

We are also using stro-motion, athlete tracking technology for enhanced replay packages, and I put a challenge down to Tara and Johnny to become Titans of the telly and channel their inner John Madden. So I think that all in all is going to come across as a really enhanced figure skating broadcast.

Then up in snowboarding we are going to have raw motion data tracking, what the heck did that mean, and that means that you'll be able to see the jump height in the halfpipe which is really cool. At alpine we have added motion sensors to give us even better speed and wind -- wind and speed.

MIKE TIRICO: It will be a lot for sure for the analysts and what I love about the Olympics, especially the Winter Games, you're watching them and you're trying to figure out how many rotations were in this or was it a 1080 out of the pipe, and for those of us who don't do that, which is very few of us, or for those of us who don't watch it all the time it's hard to pick it up but our analysts puck it up right away; the athlete we cover four careers ago sometimes become our teammates.

So can you share who is new on our commentator roster for these games?

MOLLY SOLOMON: Yeah, so this is exciting. So Lindsay Vonn is going to be joining us in the primetime show as a prime time correspondent, and she is going to be able to give us her perspective on Mikaela Shiffrin and the Alpine competition. You're going to hear from her a little later in this event.

And then Ted Ligety is our new Alpine analyst, and from what we've heard in the lead-up events, I think he has incredible potential. I think he and Dan Hicks are going to be a terrific team.

And then I get excited about some more Olympic champions. We are adding Kelly Clark and Hannah Kearney to our snowboarding and free-style skiing team.

I know the conversations, Mike, that you and I have shared with them, really insightful. So they get me really excited as we contemporize our announcer roster.

But Mike, you're no longer the new guy. You have now done a Winter -- two Summer and one Winter Games, but wondering, you know, I know I've been busy in this quick turnaround but how have you been preparing in this very short time?

MIKE TIRICO: That's a very nice way for to you say pretty much I am the old guy in the room now, Molly, but I am with regards this Olympic group.

Yeah, it's kind of a 4, 3, 2, 1 for me. This is my fourth Olympic Games with NBC, third as primetime home and second Winter Games. Coming off Tokyo pretty quickly into football. It's been a lot of split life, especially the last five or six weeks: Watch your football, do your football prep for Football Night in America and calling some games and then do the prep for the Olympics, and it's been a challenge but it's been so much fun and I think easier because it is my second Winter Games as the primetime host. A lot of the characters repeat and return the storylines, the sports that we don't cover mainstream as much, are more first nature, and I've been watching them



the last three or four years.

In terms of three, doing three primetime games in Asia for me, it is already answered the question of what the days will be like and the rhythm of flipping your body schedule and our mornings in Asia are nighttime and primetime back in the United States, East and West Coast and that's all fun.

Fourth Olympics, third primetime, second Winter and the one, the ones in a generation, once in a career, never happened before, part of this, that we will get the opportunity to be a part the Olympics and the Super Bowl on the same day. February 13th will be the most massive undertaking that any company has been involved with in terms of sports broadcasting with the biggest event in the world, the Olympics, and the biggest event in America, the Super Bowl, on the same day.

I'll let you share some of the planning and some of the intersection of the Super Bowl and the Olympics on that same day.

MOLLY SOLOMON: It's going to be one of those great days for sports fans, right, Olympics and Super Bowl on the same day as you mentioned. And it's going to be quite an odyssey for you, Tirico, because you are going to start in Beijing and then head to SoFi stadium in L.A. and make that trek and not miss a primetime show.

So you'll be hosting the middle weekend of the Olympics Friday, Saturday, Sunday night from SoFi Stadium. And we are lucky and pleased to announce that Craig Melvin from The Today Show, he is going to be back in Beijing and he will be hosting Prime Plus that middle weekend and covering any Beijing-based news and we are super excited about that. You know, we are calling it Super Bowl Sunday, Mike. You can start on your couch at 8:00 a.m. with live Olympic competition, and go straight into the Super Bowl pregame show, the big game and at the end of the night after the Lombardi trophy is presented we are going back to Beijing.

MIKE TIRICO: Yeah, we are going to be that Super Bowl party guest that doesn't leave because we're going to be there first and stays last. We're going to leave the light on for you.

Usually, Molly, we talk about the Super Bowl and we're promoting a new show that's going to follow the trophy presentation at the end of the game, and obviously it's different. So detail about what our plan is going to be after the trophy is handed out at SoFi.

MOLLY SOLOMON: It's super cool, you'll have a

championship crowned on the football field, and then we're going to Beijing and we have two Gold Medal finals in that hour 15 after Super Bowl concludes. It's free skating free dance live and then Monova, and Monova, you might ask, because I asked myself because it's a new event in women's bobsled, women drive, one person, one woman drives the sled; and it goes I think more than 70 miles an hour, so a little NASCAR on ice, our analyst tells us it's really hard to drive because it's so light so anything can happen.

And it just turns out there's two American medal contenders in women's monobod that we are really excited about and once that concludes we go straight to the free dance and there's two American contenders in the medal contenders, too. It's going to be quite an exciting few hours after the Super Bowl so stay up later with us.

MIKE TIRICO: It's going to start early, stay all day.

Let's start talking about the host nation and China, a topic on the mind of so many people in every facet of the Olympic movement and broadcasting world and sport world. Hosting a summer and Winter Games, first city to do that obviously but take us back to 2008, those Beijing games and that opening ceremony was such a spectacle really set a bar in so many ways. What do we expect from the opening ceremony for 2022?

MOLLY SOLOMON: I think that's what we are really, really intrigued by because the director, Zhang Yimou, is coming back so he's going to be in charge of the ceremony, and as you say it was such a jaw-dropping spectacle. I kind of feel like it's waiting to see what a director has in store after he has a blockbuster action movie. You know, what's his Olympic sequel.

In terms of our coverage, you know, it's going to be similar to Tokyo, it's going to be live in the morning, with you and Savannah Guthrie hosting and then we'll have an enhanced presentation in primetime when the majority of people can watch and that's where we're really going to be able to follow Team USA, their trek to the stadium and talk to the American athletes about the upcoming Olympics.

And a favorite feature of mine that we introduced in Tokyo, we actually talked live to the flag bearers as they walked into the stadium. We had their family back home and to me it was one of those spine-tingling moments because you felt like you were experiencing the emotion and the pride of the American flag bearers. So very excited about February 4th.

MIKE TIRICO: And certainly at every Olympics the host country takes the stage for its moment with the world



watching, and obviously the host country here in China is the next in line of many host countries that have politics or geopolitical issues surrounding them at the moment that they host the Games and these have certainly been raised to a different level and are very unique.

So can you share the plan of how to discuss the geopolitical issues around China and balance that with the coverage of the Olympic competition.

MOLLY SOLOMON: You know what, we are going to be focusing on telling the stories of team USA and covering the competition. But the world as we all know is a really complicated place right now and we understand that there's some difficult issues regarding the host nation.

So our coverage will provide perspective on China's place in the world and the geopolitical context in which these Games are being held. But the athletes do remain the centerpiece of our coverage.

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