

INHOSPITALITY: Invisible war of Olympic Game

The suicide of Olympic champion and members of Olympic Family

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Chapter 8. Suicide Case Study: Olympic Games (III)

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Chapter 8. Suicide Case Study: Olympic Games (III)

8.1. The 2000 Olympic gold medalist commits suicide, Australia

The press has reported a „Olympic gold medalist commits suicide“ in 2007 and further that “One of Sweden's most renowned sportsmen, wrestling champion Mikael Ljungberg, 34, died yesterday. Reports confirmed that the Olympic gold-medalist from Sydney 2000 committed suicide at Mölndal hospital, just outside of Gothenburg, on Wednesday afternoon” (Published: 18 Nov 04 16:40 CET (<http://www.thelocal.se>, 15.11.2008)).

“Mikael Ljungberg, "was one of Sweden's most successful wrestlers with gold medals in both the Olympics and European Athletics Championships. The gold medal in Sydney 2000 was the highlight of his career," the paper said, reprinting the memorable picture of his victory celebrations in which King Carl Gustav is giving him a bear-hug.

"Sweden Must Grieve" ran the headline on SvD's website Thursday afternoon, admitting its utter shock at the tragic death of one of the country's Olympians. Choosing to put the personal alongside the professional, the paper celebrated the "explosive" talents of Ljungberg in the ring and the "calm and thoughtful man" he was away from the sport's arena.

“Sara Eriksson, Ljungberg's fellow Öregryte club member, told GP when she heard Ljungberg had accepted the position, "It's great that he's standing up for himself and ignoring all the negative stuff that's been said. I think there's been too much crap thrown about over “Ljungberg's appointment”. It should have been discussed internally before it was all made clear."

Eriksson went on to put her full support behind Ljungberg. "I really believe he's the right man for the job. He's well-known and has good contacts with the media, sponsors and ...the Swedish Olympic Committee."

”Expressen talked to Sven-Olof Marklund, chairman of Spes, an association for the prevention of suicide, who said "We need more resources in psychiatry, hospitals and schools “to tackle suicide”. Marklund believes many suicides could be averted if enough work was done to tackle the causes. "It's a serious problem facing society. The recent cuts in healthcare and schools means there aren't enough personnel. It's particularly important for young people to have someone to talk to."

“Last year approximately 7,600 people were treated for attempted suicide in Sweden. After the tragic events of yesterday, Swedish wrestling has lost a legendary champion and the man who, it seemed, was destined to oversee its future”. (Dagens Nyheter, et.al. 2007).

8.2. Athens Olympic Game 2004, Greece

8.2.1. The 2004 Olympic Greek judo champion

Reuters reported: “A lovers' tiff prompted Greek Olympic judoka Eleni Ioannou to jump off the balcony of the flat she shared with her boyfriend Saturday, six days before the Games' opening ceremony. Guilt drove Giorgos Chrisostomidis to a copy-cat jump two days later. Both are in hospital fighting for their lives after the three-story fall” (www.reuters.com, Aug. 10, 2004 09:00 AM, Tzortzi).

Another report reads: Athens - “This should come as a relief to the Greeks, as they have been making the news for nothing other than their shortcomings in the past few months. Now they can focus on their athletes. Athletes such as a member of the Greek Judo team, Eleni Ioannou. Eleni had become a local celebrity in Ionia since she qualified for the Olympic team in the 172-pound-plus weight division. The three-time national champion was the pride of her city”(www. Sports-central.org/sports/2004/08/10/) (Chalifoux, 2004).

“She saved him from drugs and he loved her almost to death - it's a Romeo and Juliet tragedy updated for the 2004 Athens Olympics”. According to the Greek “Apogevmatini” daily that ran the story under a headline of “They are fighting death for their love,” the couple had been living together for more than one and a half years. The young man, who lost his father at a young age and was raised by his grandparents, was a drug addict until he met Ioannou, who supported him and got him into detox. “As he told police in his statement, the prospect of a short time apart - as she was going into the Olympic Village with all the other athletes - upset him, and his insecurity led him to fear he would lose her.”

“They had a verbal fight, and he slapped her. She slapped him back in panic, then run off to the balcony and jumped,” Eleftheros Typos added. “How did it get to this? Did their conversation go something like?

Eleni: I'm playing solitaire on the computer now, deal with it.

Boy: No, no you're not. Just because you are an Olympian doesn't mean you get to play first.

Eleni: Eh, yes it does. Jerk.

Boy: That was mean, but I'm bigger than you so I play first or else I'm telling your mom.

Eleni: Oh, I'll show you (Eleni exits stage right, off the balcony)”

([www. Sport central.org/sports/2004/08/10/](http://www.Sportcentral.org/sports/2004/08/10/)).

"She got through a tough preparation period, there was also pressure from her relationship, and that is how we got here. I ask all Greeks to make a wish for her," Ioannou's coach Giorgos Boutakis was quoted in Kathimerini daily as saying. Ioannou has been in intensive care since”. "After Eleni's fall, the world went out from under his feet," Apogevmatini quoted friends of the boyfriend as saying.

According to Eleftheros Typos, he was racked with guilt and thought himself responsible for her injury. "On Monday noon, Giorgos was eating with his grandmother in the flat, when suddenly he told her 'I want to go to Eleni', left the table and jumped from the same spot on the balcony," “Eleftheros Typos” wrote. ‘He had put himself on trial and condemned himself.’” (www.reuters.com, Aug. 10, 2004 09:00am, Tzortzi).

This was seen in a critical fashion and less sympathetic and even cynical by other media: “Eleni took temper tantrums to a whole new level as she drove her point home by running and hurling herself off of their third-story balcony. A few days later, her boyfriend jumped off of the same balcony out of grief” ([www. Sports-central.org/sports/2004/08/10/](http://www.Sports-central.org/sports/2004/08/10/)).

How can a “role model” move to suicide and become the focus of such a media frenzy? It might seem ironic that after playing an inconsequential game (“solitaire”), she went "all out," jumping out the window and lingering close to death, while she knew what she wanted from life and loved judo more than anything else. The mystification of the hero and role model has caused society to forget she is also a normal human being, and to ignore the mental health stressors that has led to this state. Thus, it is time for giving attention to mental health of athletes in our society.

8.2.2. The Austrian 2004 Olympic judo medalist commits suicide

Austrian Press agency reported “VIENNA (AP) - The Austrian judo federation says former Olympic judo silver medalist Claudia Heill of Austria has committed suicide by jumping out of a sixth-story window in central Vienna. She was 29. The federation said in a statement, "nobody could foresee this act of desperation." It did not provide further details. Federation president Hans Paul Kutschera told national broadcaster ORF on Thursday that Heill "was a very active person. Everyone who knew her is devastated."

Heil won silver in the under-53 kilogram category at the 2004 Athens Olympics.

Heil also “won silver at the European championships in 2001 and '05, but retired one year after finished fifth at the '08 Beijing Games. She had since been working as a juniors' coach” (<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/pjstar/obituary.aspx?n=claudia-heill&pid=149831309>, access at 8 00am, 2011-4-7).

There are many reports in Austrian and German media (in the German original “Österreichische Olympia-Zweite nimmt sich das Leben. Schock im österreichischen Judoverband: Claudia Heill, 29 Jahre alte Olympia-Zweite von Athen 2004, stürzte sich in Wien aus dem sechsten Stock eines Hauses“). Nobody had any prior warning of her impulsive decision(Retrieved from <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/pjstar/obituary>).

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8.3. Bei Jing Olympic Games 2008, P.R. China

Every Olympiad creates heroes, and features intense emotions of success, regret and a host of other heightened emotions. This is part and parcel of the Olympics.

16000 athletes, 209 countries participated in Beijing 2008 Olympic Game. China gained 100 medals from a total of 302 medals. 51 gold, 21 silvers, 28 bronze. The United States 36 Gold, 38 silver, 36 bronze, and all together 110 medals. The 3rd is The Russian Federation, 23 Gold, 21 silver, 28 copper, total 72 medals; 4th is Great Britain 47 medals and 5th is Germany 41 medals.

Sport psychologists have analyzed the Game with a critical mind. Beyond the Game...

8.3.1. Olympic Swiss athlete Lukas Wernas commits suicide

„Dass sich Lukas Wernas, der 22jährige Anwärter auf die Olympiade in Peking, Ende April das Leben nahm“. “22 years old Olympic Swiss athlete Lukas Wernas commits suicide end April. 2008 shortly before the Beijing Olympic Games” (Media Interview, with researcher, April.2008).

3.3.2. Olympic marathon champ Sammy Wanjiru's death a possible suicide

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Kenyan Olympic marathon champion Sammy Wanjiru died in his prime after a fall from a second-floor balcony during a domestic dispute involving his wife and another woman, officials said Monday(5/16/2011).



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By David J. Phillip, AP

Sammy Wanjiru of Kenya, above celebrating his 2008 gold finish in the men's marathon at the Beijing Games, jumped from a balcony after a dispute with his wife late Sunday night.

One police official said the 24-year-old Wanjiru committed suicide, while another said he jumped to stop his wife from leaving the house after she discovered him with another woman. His agent, Federico Rosa, excluded suicide.

At the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Wanjiru became the first Kenyan to win a gold medal in the marathon. At 21, he had the promise to dominate the distance for another decade.

"It is a huge tragedy," Jos Hermens, a long distance expert and manager of Ethiopian great Haile Gebrselassie, told the Associated Press. "He could have won two, three more Olympic Games. He was an incredible talent."

Wanjiru — who won five of his seven marathons and was the youngest runner to win four "major" marathons — died late Sunday at his home in the town of Nyahururu, in the Rift Valley, the cradle of Kenyan long-distance running. Ombati said the balcony is between 13 and 19 feet high. He said the runner landed on a hard surface. "His head was intact but they may have been internal injuries which only a post-mortem can reveal," Ombati said.

In addition to the Olympics, Wanjiru won the London Marathon in 2009 and in Chicago in 2009 and 2010, in the process running the fastest ever time recorded in a marathon in the United States. Gebrselassie, a two-time Olympic 10,000-meter champion and world-record holder in the marathon, said on his Twitter feed that he was "totally shocked" by the news.

"My thoughts are with his family and all his friends and colleagues," Gebrselassie said. "Of course one wonders if we as an athletics family could have avoided this tragedy," he said. Kenyan Prime Minister Raila Odinga said Wanjiru was "steadily developing into our country's running phenomenon." He

offered condolences to family, friends, Kenya and the entire world athletics community, calling the death "a big blow to our dreams."

London Marathon race director David Bedford said Wanjiru "was in my opinion the best marathon runner ever." Wanjiru had a history of domestic problems. Last December, he was charged with wounding his security guard with a rifle and threatening to kill his wife and maid. The runner denied all charges and was released on bail. "That was another issue," said Rosa, adding that Wanjiru had been attacked more than once at his home and threatened with kidnapping and had the weapon for preventive reasons only. Hermens said Wanjiru saw too much success too early in his career.

"Sammy Wanjiru was an accomplished runner who will be remembered for winning the first Olympic gold medal for Kenya in marathon and setting a new Olympic record in the process," the International Olympic Committee said in a statement. "Our thoughts are with his family and friends." (Retrieved from http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/sports/olympics/2011-05-16-sammy-wanjiru-commits-suicide_N.htm)

8.3.3. I've had crippling depression and suicide attempt, says swimming legend Ian Thorpe

Former Wallaby Ben Tune spoke publicly this year of his suicide attempt and using prescription drugs, exposing his past to help remove the stigma of depression.

NRL star Brett Seymour to Collingwood's Harry O'Brien have all been trapped in the cycle of depression.

Our greatest have struggled and the question has to be asked; 'Are Australia's sporting bodies doing enough to care and protect their athletes?'

J. Bond, who was the head of psychology at the Australian Institute of Sport for 22 years, replies unequivocally; "No, no, no, absolutely not". He says performance is now valued over mental health. "Sports clubs and bodies go to great lengths to protect the athletes because they want them on the field to win but by the same token we do not protect them," Bond said (Retrieved from www.news.com.au/.../ive-had-crippling-depression-ian-thorpe).

Olympic great Ian Thorpe, who struggled with depression during his career, and still does to this day, believes more must be done to protect athletes. "I think we need to look at the long-term implications of being put into situations that are quite unique to sport," Thorpe told The Sunday Telegraph.

"There is an expectation on athletes that all of us will behave ourselves, we will be in these high-profile positions and we will know exactly what to do in them. We become role models, all these things you can't really be taught quickly.

8.3.4. Former Wallaby star Ben Tune says he won't beat depression but he is now a better man

Trickett, who found it hard to even get out of bed at times in 2010 when wrestling with a retirement, raises the responsibilities of the athlete on this issue.

"On some levels I don't think there is enough being done," Trickett said. "But on some levels, how much is it the responsibility of the individual and how much is it the responsibility of the sport?"

"I think it is about finding that balance where sports psychology isn't being jammed down the athlete's throat and the athlete taking enough initiative to say; 'I am not handling this, who can I speak to to effectively use my thoughts, or lessen my stress _ or alternatively with retirement, how do I process it and make it work for me?"

It's hard enough being a teenager let alone a teen sporting prodigy, notes adolescent psychologist Dr Michael Carr-Gregg. He dubs being a teen champion, like Trickett, Thorpe and Jones did, in any sport "phenomenally difficult".

"I can not express to you how much admiration I have for the ones who have made it," Dr Carr-Gregg says. "They deserve everything they get." (Retrieved from www.couriermail.com.au/.../former-wallaby-star-ben-tune-says-h.)

While Jones said growing up as teenager in the spotlight was no doubt difficult - she first suffered depression after she wrestled with the fallout of her silver medal at the Olympics in 2004 - her life went haywire when her identity started to obsessively revolve around becoming an Olympic gold medalist.

"When the depression side left, it just turned into psychosis about winning," Jones said. "That's what it takes to win, you have to be a bit mental, and I was. All the best people are a bit crazy about winning but it does certainly come at a cost" Retrieved from www.couriermail.com.au/.../former-wallaby-star-ben-tune-says-h).

8.3.5. Depression haunts Aussie swimmer Petria Thomas

In her pursuit of Olympic gold she embarked on a "crazy" diet of cereal for breakfast, an apple for lunch and then soup for dinner coupled with six hours of training.

"It was just insane," Jones said. "I am learning at uni that brains really don't like you not giving it food, that definitely played a massive role in not mentally being very well." "It's only until now that it's really sunk in that swimming is just something you do, it's not who you are. "By London I had realised what a blip on the radar you are when it comes to world issues. Swimming became purely for my enjoyment, I mean I am not curing cancer, I had that perspective. "If I had have got fifth in Beijing I would have been torn apart but fifth in London I was like; 'woo hoo'."

What can now be revealed was that it was massive feat for Jones to make it to the world championships in 2011 and London after dealing with the darkest days of her life.

It was late in 2010 she struggled to train and when she did she was often in tears constantly. She had suicidal thoughts.

"It was the worst I had ever been," Jones said. "I thought; if I don't have swimming, I don't have anything else, so what's the point? "When you are out of it, you can't believe you were in it. I just had to dig through it."

Thorpe, Trickett and Jones all urged young athletes to take a more "holistic" approach to sport.

"Just be interested in something else," Jones said. "Just make sure you are nurturing yourself with something that makes you happy, because I certainly didn't do that at all.

"Don't ever sacrifice your mental health" (Retrieved from <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/leisel-jones-reveals>).

8.3.6. Leisel Jones reveals "psychotic" pursuit of gold medal at Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 cost her Mental Health

LEISEL Jones says her Olympic gold medal came at the cost of her mental health.

The retired four-time Olympian has revealed her entire self-worth was invested in winning in the lead up to the Beijing Games in 2008.

"I won an Olympic gold medal but at what cost?" Jones said. "It totally cost me my mental health, my well-being. I am very happy to have it, but it cost me so much." Jones spoke to The Sunday Telegraph about her "psychotic" pursuit of gold so young athletes can learn from her mistakes and to emphasis how important caring for one's mental health is.

She said back then she felt she couldn't live if she couldn't be known as an Olympic gold medalist. "I was psychotic about winning. It was the be all and end all," Jones said. "I long-jumped over the line of craziness to get to that point ... it came at a cost of relationships, family and social time. I was a mess. "I was just running on adrenalin. Just surviving. There were crazy diets. I was just a basket case. I was horrible to be around. It was pretty tough. At the time it was really important to win it. Looking back, would I do it again? I am not quite sure."

Following her experience, the 28-year-old is now studying to become a psychologist in the hope of preventing athletes from enduring the same harrowing times she endured.

Editorial: Time we put our athletes' well-being before glory

By late 2010, LEISEL Jones had fallen into depression, she struggled to train and had suicidal thoughts, but was led out of this darkness by her long-time psychologist Lisa Stevens. "She was phenomenal," Jones said. "Finally, my mental health started to come first."

Jones's story is not rare. Many of Australia's finest athletes have and do suffer mentally in the pursuit of success.

Last year, five-time Olympic champion Ian Thorpe revealed he had suicidal thoughts and drank to cover his emotional pain in the lead up to the Athens Olympics.

Triple Olympic gold medalist Petria Thomas once overdosed on paracetamol.

Sprint queen Libby Trickett would often break down in tears when she first retired from swimming in 2010.

Geoff Huegill took anti-depressants on and off for six years and fell hard into a party lifestyle following his first retirement in 2004.

The black dog doesn't just chase our swimmers.

8.4. London Olympic Game 2012, UK

8.4.1. Suicide after Olympic failure? Russia's volleyball coach found hanged in hotel

Sergey Ovchinnikov, the Russian women's national volleyball team coach, has committed suicide following his team's Olympic failure, RT.com reported .

The 43-year-old coach was at a training camp in Croatia with his team, Dynamo Moscow, when he died.

Former coach Vladimir Kuzyutkin said the suicide could have been due to the Russian team's poor performance at the London Olympics. "He was my friend, my colleague," Kuzyutkin was quoted as saying. "Yes, there was a blunder at the Olympics, well, to hell with it. I don't know why he couldn't cope with it."

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The head coach of Russia's national men's volleyball team, Vladimir Alekno, confirmed that the rout in London was a huge blow to Ovchinnikov. "He took the Olympics very personally," Alekno reportedly said. "I saw what he was going through and how upset he was after the defeat. He didn't talk much."

The Russian squad was one of the favorites in women's volleyball at the London Games, but the team missed out on the medals, losing to Brazil in the quarterfinals.

Sergey Ovchinnikov, 43, was at a training camp in Croatia with his team Dynamo Moscow when the tragedy occurred. According to Croatia's 24sata news website, Ovchinnikov missed breakfast; when the club's employees went to his room, they discovered him hanging(August/29/2012).

Russian Volleyball Federation director general Aleksandr Yeremenko confirmed the news of his death, but said he was unable to provide any further details.

Former Russian coach Vladimir Kuzyutkin speculated the suicide may have been a reaction to the poor showing of the Russian women's volleyball team at the 2012 London Olympics.

"This is so stupid," Kuzyutkin told the RSN radio station. "He was my friend, my colleague. No one said a bad word about him. Yes, there was a blunder at the Olympics, well, to hell with it. I don't know why he couldn't cope with it."

Ovchinnikov's team entered the London Games as one of the favorites. But the team missed out on medals, losing 3-2 in the quarterfinals to future Olympic champions Brazil.

The head coach of the men's volleyball team, Vladimir Alekno, confirmed that the London failure was a huge blow for Ovchinnikov.



Russian women's volleyball squad head coach, Sergey Ovchinnikov (RIA Novosti/Vladimir Pesnya)

"He took the Olympics very personally," Alekno said. "I saw what he was going through and how upset he was after the defeat. He didn't talk much. Even after victories he was always thinking about something and smoked a lot." Another reason behind the possible suicide may be health problems. Sovetsky Sport reported that Ovchinnikov had recently been suffering from strong headaches.

The cause of death has not been officially announced, with the Russian embassy in Croatia awaiting confirmation from local authorities.

"The information we have is from Russian sources only," embassy press secretary Boris Pavlov told Interfax. "Croatian colleagues haven't reached out for us yet. So the circumstances of the incident aren't clear to us yet." The coach will be buried in the Russian city of Yaroslavl, where his wife and two children live.

Ovchinnikov led the country's student squad to bronze at the 2011 Universiade, and was tapped to coach the national team the same year. Under his leadership, Russia progressed to the London Games, earning the first slot in the world qualifiers.

Brazil's Sheilla Castro (bottom L) defends against Russia's Nataliya Goncharova during their women's quarterfinal volleyball match at Earls Court during the London 2012 Olympic Games August 7, 2012. (Reuters/Ivan Alvarado)

Brazil's players celebrate winning their women's quarterfinal volleyball match against Russia at Earls Court during the London 2012 Olympic Games August 7, 2012. (Reuters/Ivan Alvarado)

Russia's head coach Sergey Ovchinnikov (2nd R) speaks to his players during their women's volleyball qualifying tournament match against Serbia for the London Olympics in Tokyo, on May 25, 2012 (AFP Photo/Toshifumi Kitamura) (Retrieved from <https://www.rt.com/sport/ovchinnikov-russia-volleyball-suicide-832/>) (RIA Novosti/Igor Zarembo, 2012).

8.4.2. London 2012 Olympics: 'I contemplated suicide', says Gemma Spofforth

Great Britain's former 100m backstroke world record holder on coping with loss, counselling and gaining a mental advantage



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Gemma Spofforth competes in the 100m backstroke at the British Gas Championships in March.
Photograph: Richard Heathcote/Getty Images

Before the race the swimmers wait in the call room. Each follows her own routine. Some are still, some pace back and forth, some are silent, some are vocal. Gemma Spofforth, the world record holder and former world champion at the 100m backstroke, sits, watches and thinks. "The call room," Spofforth says, "is my sanctuary." In there she feels she has an advantage over her rivals. It is not the conviction that comes with her achievements, the knowledge of her own superiority. It is what she does away from the pool that gives her an edge, not what she has done in it. "I can see other people's nerves and be one up on them," Spofforth says. "It is nice to read people, to know they are more nervous than me or just as nervous as me. For the next minute of our lives we have all got the same opportunity."

Before the British Olympic trials Spofforth says she willed herself into a state of mental numbness. "I took away all the emotions that I might need to swim fast and I took away all the emotions that would give me any nerves or anxiety before the race. I was just numb because I was thinking: 'If I don't make it, I don't want to be in the depths of despair; I don't want to have to pull myself out of a hole.'"

Spofforth is 24 but has had more than enough despair in her life already. She does not want to invite more in. In 2007 her mother, Lesley, died of stomach cancer. In 2011 she lost both her father's girlfriend, June, and June's daughter Vicky, both to cancer. There have been times, Spofforth admits in her autobiography, due to be published after the Olympics, when she contemplated committing suicide. "Is the concrete hard enough?" Spofforth writes in *Dealing With It: Five Years of Mourning, Medals and Men*. "I could jump right now. I could escape. I would not have to deal with it, wouldn't have to think, wouldn't have to worry." That was when she was standing on a hotel balcony, during a training camp on the Gold Coast in Australia.

Spofforth stepped back from the edge. For the past three years she has been working as a volunteer on a suicide crisis line in Florida, where she lives. To jump, she says, would have made her a hypocrite. "Right after the death of my mum, I went to a few classes. One of them was in psychology and one of my friends who was sat next to me was like 'You know, you'd be good at this'. So I went through six weeks of intensive training and I was on the lines at the end of those six weeks." Soon afterwards she became an associate, which meant that she was qualified to go out and try to talk people down off the ledge. "I have seen a couple of dead bodies here and there, because the families of a dead person need crisis counselling.

As recently as last Christmas, seven months out from a competition for which she has been preparing for seven years, she was thinking about quitting her sport. "Right from the beginning of my career London 2012, or even before we got the bid, the 2012 Olympics was always my goal."

After the world championships in Shanghai last year, when Spofforth was ill and finished 17th, those doubts grew. Bad thoughts began to fester. "It was very real after Shanghai. There was a lot of times then when I just thought: 'This is the end of my career. I can't do another year.' Over Christmas it was hard because the pressure was insane." The pressure, Spofforth explains, comes from the people around her. The problem with her compartmentalisation techniques, she says, is that she "can only be in control of myself, not everyone else".

Two days after she qualified for the Olympic team Spofforth discovered she had also got funding for a place on a Masters course in mental health counselling. "It was an amazing week for me. Everything just kind of set in place." At long last (retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2012/may/09/london-2012-gemma-spofforth>).

8.4.3. Official: Olympic fail led to judoka Elena Ivashchenko's suicide



Elena Ivashchenko competes in the 78-kilogram division at the 2012 Olympics.

MOSCOW (AP) -- A Russian judo official says a four-time European judo champion who committed suicide had been depressed since failing to win a medal at last year's London Olympics.

The Omsk-born sportswoman, whom admirers from around the world called 'white bear'. Authorities said Elena Ivashchenko died on Saturday at age 28 after jumping off the balcony of a 15th-floor apartment in the Siberian city of Tyumen.



Picture: Vyacheslav Verenich

'Just as her victories will forever stay in the history, Lena will be always remembered by everyone and anyone who knew her'.

The director of a Tyumen judo center, Vyacheslav Yurlov, told the Russian state news agency RIA Novosti that her depression had started after she was eliminated in the quarterfinals at the London Games. Yurlov also said Ivashchenko needed several operations to treat a leg injury and had another one scheduled. Ivashchenko won gold at the European Judo Championships in 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2012 (Paul Sancya, 12, June, 2013).

It is with deep sorrow that the World of Judo learnt four-time European judo champion Elena Ivashchenko, 28, died Saturday in the Siberian city of Tyumen.

The Russian Judo Federation issued a statement honouring Ivashchenko "big, kind, strong talented, successful and title-winning." "Everybody who spoke to Lena was infected by her energy and began to develop a liking for this very positive girl," the Federation said on their website. "We offer our deepest condolences to friends and family."

The EJU president, Mr. Sergey Soloveychik, on behalf of the European Judo Union, expresses heartfelt condolences to Elena's family, friends, to the Russian Judo Federation and the Russia's women's judo team. It is a terrible loss for Russian judo. Elena was one of the strong pillars of the Russian women's team and in her category. Her bright personality will be forever in our minds.

'She was always like a ray of sunshine - so bright was the colour of her hair, and so welcoming and smiley', said a statement from the Russian Judo Federation. 'She was kind, strong, big, talented, successful, and she had so many awards. Judo trainer Vladimir Elchaninov said: 'As far as I know Elena committed suicide by throwing herself out of the window. There was no obvious reasons for it. I can't explain why she did it in that way and can only express my condolences.'

Born in the Siberian city of Omsk, near Russia's border with Kazakhstan, Ivashchenko won a gold medal at the European Judo Championships in 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2012. She won silver at the World Judo Championships in 2008, and bronze in 2007 and 2011. Last summer she represented Russia at the Olympics in London. Elena Ivashchenko was one of Europe's major champions of the last decade. Elena Ivaschenko competed in London at the 2012 Summer Olympics in the +78 kg event and lost in the repechage to Iryna Kindzerska. She won a silver medal (2008) and two bronze medals (2007, 2011) at the World Judo Championships.

She won four gold medals (2007, 2009, 2011, 2012) and one bronze medal (2006) at the European Judo Championships (The Siberian Times reporter, 16 June 2013).

8.4.4. Tragic death of Billy Ward shocks Olympic boxing family

BILLY Ward smiles out from his Facebook page, a tiny 20-year-old with a mop of curly red hair and a cheeky grin that endeared him to all the other gutsy fighters on the Australian Olympic boxing team.

A tiny 49kg of restless energy, Billy arrived home at Gladstone Airport from the London Games last August declaring he couldn't wait to have a lash at the best boxers in the world at Rio in four years.

But last Sunday, this little champion did what six other Australians do every day. He took his own life.

THE Gladstone region is in shock after the death of local boxer and teen Olympian Billy Ward on Sunday. And Australia's boxing community is mourning with them, saying the young man "couldn't see the bright future he had ahead of him". Australian boxing team captain Luke Jackson confirmed the sad news on Facebook late Sunday night.

The Australian Olympic boxers, tough young men used to pain, are devastated.

"Billy was a quiet, shy kid without a lot of confidence and in London I took him under my wing and tried to boost him up. I told him he was in a very privileged position fighting at the Olympics at such a young age. I wish he realized he had so many supporters."

Olympic coach Don Abnett said: "Billy was a very talented boxer but he was such a nice kid you wondered how he could even punch someone."

On the eve of the Games, the little Aussie battler fronted a local campaign in his city to support the life-saving work of the Red Cross and he arrived home from London after losing his only fight there on points with another message of support for his community.

"People will put you down in life," Billy told reporters, "but if you really want something, go for it. You've got to be a shepherd and not a sheep."

Over the next 12 months, Billy used his Facebook page to chronicle both the joy and rage of a young man who, away from the gym, worked hard on his parents' farm at Mount Larcom, 40km from Gladstone.

He laughed off a fine from the Gladstone Magistrates Court in January after an altercation with police in which no conviction was recorded and on March 18, wrote: "Life's short, forget your problems, be happy, and live your life because you never know if there will be another tomorrow."

But on May 12 he posted: "sometimes you try so hard not to give up or give in but at the end off (sic) the day every battle small or big must come to an end. On May 17: "i am not afraid of dieing (sic) i am afraid of not living!" Billy had his 20th birthday on July 16 and eight days later changed his Facebook profile picture to a logo of the word "Life" made from other words such as Courage, Hope, Feeling, Love and Dream.

On August 2 he died.

Adjunct professor J. Mendoza, the former chairman of the National Advisory Council on Mental Health, said six Australians took their own lives each day and the rate of rural and regional suicides for males was about three times that of city areas.

"Isolation is a big problem in the country, along with poor access to help," Mendoza said. "It takes more gumption to see a doctor about depression in a small town because you might play footy with the doctor or know his family."

"I just wish Billy had put his hand up and asked for help," Jackson said.

"Anyone who has these bad feelings, please go and see someone - a friend or a doctor. Tough times get better (Grantlee Kieza, CourierMail, August 11, 2013).

"Billy has shown us that you can't fight depression alone" (Retrieved from <http://www.couriermail.com.au/sport/boxing-mma/tragic-death-of-billy-ward-shocks-olympic-boxing-family/news-story>).

8.5. Rio 2016 Olympic Game, Brazil

8.5.1. Anthony Ervin is going for gold again at Rio after attempting suicide and battling alcohol and drug addiction

Anthony Ervin won gold in the men's 50m freestyle at the Olympic Games in 2000 and was then the pin-up boy for US swimming at just 19.

Ervin admits now, 16 years on, that he wasn't happy, felt controlled by the swimming pool and wanted to rebel. In the year that followed his win at Sydney he suffered with addiction, drank heavily and tried to commit suicide.

He does, however, remember what it was like when he started to feel withdrawn from a life that had become toxic so very soon after it had hit the high notes. 'I was in a state of rebellion,' he told The Times. 'As soon as something appears before me that seems like its sole purpose is to control me, I will fight it, and for a while that was the pool.' At 35 he compete at the Rio Games and says he no longer feels shackled by the fear he once had.



In 2001, the American won the 50m and 100m freestyle events at the World Championships in Japan yet the man away from the pool was deteriorating.

'I felt very alone and isolated, a man atop a mountain who couldn't receive help from other people,' he said. 'I felt like they didn't understand. That loneliness became a dark well into which I plunged deeper and deeper until I no longer recognized who I thought I was and how I was seen by other people, the value that was being posited on me through a thing such as athletic prowess. It just seemed so pointless that that seemed to be what my existence was, so I just wanted to hit reset.' Indeed, he tried to hit the reset button soon after. He took an overdose of tranquillisers but the next day he woke up (Tom Farmery, August 2016).

'In one way, the suicide worked,' he said. 'A part of me that I didn't want any more did die, and what was left was a state of being reborn. Before, I couldn't move, I had become chained to the idea of who I was, shackled to the point of paralysis; and afterwards I was free.'

Ervin qualified for the Olympics in Rio after competing in the US swimming trials in June

The fact that he didn't has given him closure on part of his life he wasn't happy with. He even sold his gold medal and donated the money made from that sale to the Unicef tsunami relief fund. It was liberating, he said. His life is different now and the swimming pool remains the place where he can express himself and achieve. At Rio he'll go for gold once again without the fear he had 16 years ago (Retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/sportsnews>).

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8.5.2. A champion Paralympian may suicide after going for gold in Brazil

A CHAMPION Paralympian with an incurable disease has revealed she is targeting gold at the Games in Rio – and may then go home to kill herself.

Wheelchair sprint champion Marieke Vervoort is one of the top hopes for a medal when the Paralympics in Brazil begin tomorrow after scooping gold and silver in London four years ago.



Marieke Vervoort admits she is considering killing herself after the Paralympic Games

But the 37-year-old from Belgium admits her life is growing so difficult she is considering euthanasia when she returns from the competition. Vervoort suffers from an incurable spinal disease which not only causes huge pain but has also damaged her mentally.

She said: "I will stop my career after Rio. "I started thinking about euthanasia. Every day it hurts, some nights I do not sleep and after ten minutes' sleep I have to train. "I train very hard even if I have to fight against my disease. I hope to finish my career on a podium in Rio. "I want everyone to have a glass of champagne in hand, and a thought for me. "I suffer greatly, sometimes sleeping only ten minutes a night — and still go for the gold. "Rio is my last wish. I train very hard even if I have to fight day and night against my illness. I hope to finish my career on a podium in Rio.

“There is a chance to medal, but it will be very hard because the competition is very strong. Then we’ll see what life brings me and I try to enjoy the best moments.” (Retrieved from <https://www.thesun.co.uk/sport/rio-20169>).

Euthanasia is legal in Belgium, providing someone has the consent of three doctors – and Vervoort has already planned her own funeral.

8.5.3. Steven Holcomb: shock suicide of bobsled legend who made US a force

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Sudden loss at age 37 of three-time Olympic medalist and five-time world champion stuns US Olympic community.

America’s best bobsled pilot, Steven Holcomb, It came to a most unexpected end on Saturday in Lake Placid, New York, when he was found dead in his room at the Olympic Training Center – sending shockwaves through the US Olympic community and devastating those who had known Holcomb for the entirety of his two-decade career in sliding. He attempted suicide years ago, then revealed his story with hopes of helping others. He was a man who nearly went blind, then became an Olympic gold medalist (<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2017/may/07/steven-holcomb-shock-death-of-bobsled-legend-who-made-us-a-force>).

His life was the epitome of a bobsled race, filled with twists and turns.

The three-time Olympian, three-time Olympic medalist and five-time world champion was 37.

Winter Olympics 2018: veterans could grab record medal haul for USA

“The only reason why the USA is in any conversation in the sport of bobsled is because of Steve Holcomb,” said US bobsled pilot Nick Cunningham, who roomed next to Holcomb in Lake Placid. “He was the face of our team. He was the face of our sport. We all emulated him. Every driver in the world watched him, because he was that good at what he did. It’s a huge loss, huge loss, not just for our team but for the entire bobsled community.”

8.5.6. Oscar Pistorius 'on suicide watch' in South Africa prison

Agence France-Presse 14 August 2016 • 6:26pm Oscar Pistorius, the jailed Olympic athlete, has reportedly been put on suicide watch following mysterious wrist injuries that landed him in hospital earlier this month.

Prison officials told South Africa's City Press newspaper that the athlete, who is serving a six-year sentence for murdering his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp, was under 24-hour monitoring, with increased cell visits by wardens.

Some sources told the paper that razor blades were found in the disgraced athlete's cell last Saturday afternoon, and that his wrist injuries, described as "severe", were self-inflicted.

Prison authorities have launched a probe into the incident.

"Our internal investigation is at an advanced stage," said Singabakho Nxumalo, a correctional services spokesman.

The 29-year-old double-amputee, who is being held at the Kgosi Mampuru II Prison in Pretoria, had told prison officials he sustained the injuries falling off his bed. According to the newspaper, the injury occurred soon after he had an altercation with prison officials over medication prescribed by state doctors.

The Paralympian had refused to take the medication, saying it was "toxic" and demanded to be given medication prescribed by his private doctor. He alleged that the prison official wanted to kill him and demanded to be transferred to another jail (Agence France-Presse, 14 August 2016).

Wardens also raided his cell and found a pair of scissors, prescription drugs and "toxic pills". Pistorius's family has denied reports that the "Blade Runner" who made history by being the first disabled person to compete with able-bodied athletes in the 2012 London Olympics had tried to harm himself (Agence France-Presse, 14 August 2016).

Pistorius initially escaped a murder conviction for shooting his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp through a locked bathroom door three years ago. An appeal by prosecutors saw his manslaughter conviction upgraded to murder, and in July he was sentenced to a six-year jail term.

But prosecutors have said they would push for a longer sentence, saying six years was "shockingly lenient" (Agence France-Presse, 14 August 2016).