



CoviDB

CoviDB Speaker Series on COVID-19

Training for the Olympics During COVID-19

A Guide for Teachers and Students



Featured Speaker:

Katie Ledecky

Five-time Olympic Gold Medalist,
Swimming, Team USA



Featured Speaker:

Laura Wilkinson

Olympic Gold Medalist,
Diving, Team USA



Hosted By:

Ted Robinson

2 Time Emmy Award-Winning
Sportscaster

TeachAids

Stanford

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Stanford Program on International
and Cross-Cultural Education

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International Studies



Laura Wilkinson is an American diver, three-time Olympian, and Olympic gold medalist. Wilkinson took up platform diving at the age of 15 and joined the U.S. National Diving Team in 1995, just five years before winning an Olympic Gold Medal on the 10-meter platform at the 2000 Summer Games. Wilkinson had officially retired after the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. She had already accomplished everything there was in platform diving, becoming the first female diver to win all three of her sport's major titles: Olympics (2000), World Championships (2005) and World Cup (2004). After nine years of retirement, she returned to competition in 2017 and placed 2nd at Nationals. Currently she is training at The Woodlands Diving Academy in Texas for a fourth Olympic Games (2021).

Katie Ledecky is a five-time Olympic gold medalist and 15-time World Champion, a record for female swimmers. Ledecky won her first gold medal at the age of 15 at the 2012 London Olympics and went on to become the most decorated female athlete at the 2016 Rio Olympics. She has broken World Records 14 times and American Records 37 times, has been named female World Swimmer of the Year an unprecedented five times, USOC Female Athlete of the Year a record three times, and is already the youngest inductee ever into both the D.C. Sports Hall of Fame and the Maryland Women's Hall of Fame. A Psychology major and Academic All-American of the Year at Stanford, Ledecky won 8 NCAA titles and broke 15 NCAA records in helping to lead the Stanford women's swim team to consecutive NCAA team titles in her two seasons of collegiate competition.

Ted Robinson is a two-time Emmy Award winning sportscaster with over three decades of broadcast experience. He served as the radio voice of the San Francisco 49ers from 2009 to 2018. Robinson has served as an announcer for NBC's coverage of the Olympics since 2000. A host and commentator of the Tennis Channel, Robinson has also anchored the U.S. Open for over 20 years with tennis legend John McEnroe. His other roles have included announcing for college football and basketball, professional swimming and diving, and triathlons at NBC, as well as broadcasting for Major League Baseball teams.

The purpose of this guide is (1) to provide information to review prior to the viewing of the interview; (2) to suggest guiding questions to consider while viewing the interview; and (3) to recommend debriefing activities.

Information to review prior to the viewing of the interview

This interview discusses the journey of two Olympians as they continue to train for the 2021 Olympics amidst COVID-19, and it focuses on six topics. For teachers' information, each topic is listed below with a summary of the question asked by Ted Robinson. During the interview, important terminology is used. A list of the terms and definitions is included as well. A review of the terms and definitions is recommended prior to the viewing of the interview.

Topic 1: COVID-19 & Postponement of the Tokyo Olympics—How did COVID-19 disrupt your planning for the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics?

Topic 2: Training Amidst COVID-19—How do you maintain the discipline to run your life and maintain some semblance of the training you need? How are you dealing with safety?

Topic 3: Mental Health Amidst COVID-19 & Olympics Training—Katie, how have you tried to combat the mental health challenge that COVID-19 has posed? How much has being a student at Stanford helped with the challenge? Laura, how much do your children understand COVID-19 and what's happening now? Katie, last summer you had your own bout of the virus and it impacted your performance at the World Championships. Did that experience you went through help you now and did it make COVID-19 hit home a little closer?

Topic 4: Training Motivations & Looking Ahead—So you both talked about your improv to continue to work out. Katie, ...is it better for you now [in July than earlier during the pandemic] in your entire training regimen? Laura? Katie, how much has being a student at Stanford helped with the challenge? Laura, help us understand why you're choosing to do this [Olympics] again [after 40 years of age]? So Katie you have to understand what Laura just said: the point about passion, right? Do you see yourself going beyond? Laura, I have been around athletes in team sports who have at some point said that they kept playing because they wanted their kids to see them. Does that ring true to you right now?

Topic 5: Advice to Young Athletes—For all the young athletes watching, you know, whose sports life has been interrupted, what kind of tips or anything you wanted to say or advice to young athletes right now?

Topic 6: Winning Gold—You've both had that [Olympic] moment. You've both stood up there—the flag goes up and the anthem was played. Katie, as I say that right now what emotions run through your mind? Laura?

Definitions

Coronavirus—a common virus that infects humans, typically leading to an upper respiratory infection.

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)—an infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus. “CO” stands for “corona,” “VI” for “virus,” and “D” for disease. Sometimes referred to as novel (new) coronavirus.

Improv—abbreviation of “improvisation.”

Guiding questions to consider while viewing the interview

For teachers who share this interview with a class, consider dividing the class into six small groups and distributing one set of questions (below) to each group.

Topic 1—How did the uncertainty of whether or not the Olympics would be held or postponed affect Katie and Laura? How did the decision to postpone the Olympics affect them? What “good” things came out of the postponement?

Topic 2—What advice (from Katie and Laura) about discipline and safety, if any, can you consider in your life? How did homeschooling affect you during the pandemic? What does Laura say about the importance of stability or routine?

Topic 3—How does Katie describe the sacrifices that she is making during the pandemic? What does Katie refer to as a “silver lining” during the time of the pandemic? What significance does Laura place upon visualization during the time of the pandemic? How does Laura say about handling fear? How did the pandemic impact Laura’s role as a mother? How did Katie’s previous bout with a virus (not COVID-19) affect her mindset about the current pandemic?

Topic 4—What is Ted referring to when he mentioned “improv”? How have things changed for Laura and Katie as time has gone on during the pandemic? What is Laura referring to when she mentions “visualization”? What comments do Laura and Katie make about passion for something? What importance does Laura place upon the mental aspect of a sport?

Topic 5—What are some ways that Katie’s swim teams have stayed together during the pandemic? Is this useful to you and the groups that you belong to? If so, how?

Topic 6—What feelings did you have as you listened to Ted, Laura, and Katie talk about Olympic moments?

Recommended debriefing activities

1. Research and write a paper about the Olympic Games (other than the 2020 Summer Olympics) that have been cancelled or disrupted.
2. Laura and Katie commented on how their lives have been disrupted since the pandemic. Write a diary entry about how your life has been disrupted. What has been especially challenging? What lessons have you learned from the experience?
3. Write about a time that you have been disappointed with the cancellation of something. How did you cope with it? Did you learn something positive from the experience? Have you ever been in limbo about whether an event was going to happen or not? How did this make you feel?
4. Draft a letter (not to be sent) to the International Olympic Committee (IOC), a non-governmental organization that is responsible for organizing the modern Summer and Winter Olympic Games. What advice would you give to the IOC concerning your recommendations (concerning COVID-19) for the 2020 Summer Olympic Games, which have been postponed until 2021?
5. In addition to ways that have been widely promoted to protect yourself and others from COVID-19, e.g., washing of hands, hand sanitizers, masks, socially distancing, what else can you do to help your community or school? Develop a poster that illustrates these ways.
6. Write a reflective piece on one of the following quotes from the interview:
 - a. Ted: These are two extraordinary examples of Olympic champions. They [Laura and Katie] are not only champions in what they do—diving and swimming—but how they have conducted themselves, how they have represented the United States, Olympic teams, and athletes.
 - b. Katie (thoughts on not knowing if the 2020 Summer Olympics was going to be cancelled): It was a stressful couple of weeks at first, just not knowing what was going to happen.

- c. Laura: What was frustrating at first, turned out to be really special.
 - d. Katie: I tried to stay focused on my goals. We are going to do whatever it takes to be the best and put in the work that we know is necessary to reach our goals.
 - e. Katie: It [her studies at Stanford University] definitely creates a little more balance in my life which I really enjoy having.
 - f. Katie: This is history [the time of COVID-19] but you don't have to be afraid of it. Fear is really a mindset... so if you do everything that you can do, there is no point in worrying beyond that because worrying does not help you at all. It is not going to change anything. Do what you can control. Worry about the things that you can control and things that you cannot control, you have to let those go.
 - g. Laura: This time—as hard or as frustrating as it may be—is really an opportunity for you... This is your chance to see what you are made of and what you can do. You are going to have to think out of the box. You are going to have to get creative right now. But if you are willing to do those things and work really hard at this time, you can come back stronger...
 - h. Laura: This [challenging time] could be that gift to you. This could be that opportunity to rise to a whole new level. Don't look at this and be sad and upset. Look at this as an opportunity of how you can get ahead.
7. Design an artistic image, write a poem, or write lyrics to a song that captures the significance of one of the following quotes from the interview:
- a. Laura: The sun is a great healer in a lot of ways, both emotionally and physically.
 - b. Laura: I think that it [COVID-19] has reminded us of how connected we are as a world and how we all need to be doing our individual parts to combat this.
 - c. Laura: When you love what you do [diving] and you can still do it, why not?
 - d. Ted: I have been around athletes in team sports who at some point have said that they kept playing because they wanted their kids to see them.
 - e. Laura: Hopefully, it is leaving some kind of impression on them [her children] of what it takes to be really good at something. When you really want something—it really doesn't matter what people say about you or what they

think of you—if you think you want to do this and this is your goal, you have to go after it because you are capable of more than you probably think you are. And other people’s opinions do not need to define you or what you are capable of doing.

- f. Katie: The work that you put in doesn’t go away... It is always in the bank... At some point in the future, you are going to be able to compete again, have those opportunities to let that work show.
- g. Katie: The Olympics is ... an opportunity for the world to come together.
- h. Laura: Just in that moment [while on the Olympics podium], you realize that everything you have been through was worth it... It is the journey leading up to that moment that makes it very special.