

Dr Elsa Desmond is an F2 in acute medicine and an Olympian. She was the first Irish athlete to compete in Luge at the Winter Olympic Games in Beijing in 2022.

At the age of 8, Elsa first saw luge on TV in the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin. She decided then that she would one day be an Olympian in the sport of luge. But with Ireland having no Luge federation and never having had an Olympian in the sport it was certainly a big dream. And one that she wasn't able to start working towards for many years.

With no way into luge, Elsa followed her other dream, To become a doctor. A dream that held its own challenges due to her dyslexia.

Eventually, as a teenager, Elsa was able to try the sport of luge at a British military camp in Austria and fell in love with the sport immediately. She made the decision to enter medical school and committed herself to managing her two careers simultaneously.

At the age of 21, she made her debut on the international senior circuit, while in her 3rd year of medical school at Kings College, London. Staying up late to complete assignments, studying her flash cards between runs in the start house and sticking a sign on her door saying "Do Not Disturb" in five languages while she sat her exams remotely. All this while working as a healthcare assistant in her free time to help fund her studies and her sports career with no sponsors or funding from Sport Ireland.

With the support of her family Elsa founded the Irish Luge Federation, a sporting body which is now recognised by the Olympic Federation of Ireland, the International Luge Federation, and the International Olympic Committee. Her Irish heritage comes from her father, with grandparents from both Cavan and Cork. She has many relatives still in Cavan, and she spent many summers there as a child.

Despite being in a global pandemic and working more hours than ever in the hospital alongside being in the final year of her medical degree, in 2020 Elsa decided to try to qualify for the Olympics. She went on to qualify as a Doctor in 2021 and start her foundation job that summer in Southend Hospital in the UK. In 2022 at the age of 24, she successfully became the first Irish athlete to compete in Luge at the Winter Olympic games in Beijing, finishing a respectable 33rd.

One year on from the games, Elsa is now an F2 in acute medicine in the UK, planning on pursuing a career in emergency medicine or anaesthetics with the aim of eventually working in the air ambulance. She runs the Irish Luge Federation alongside coaching the growing junior team with the aim of ensuring the longevity of the sport within Ireland. And she continues to train and compete, currently ranked 31st in the world, she is aiming to again make history at the Milan-Cortina Olympics in 2026.