

LEADERSHIP, PREPARATION AND PERFORMANCE: KEY PATENT INNOVATIONS IN CONVERSATION WITH TEAM IRELAND AHEAD OF MILANO CORTINA 2026



With the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic Games starting in just a few day's time, Team Ireland are in advanced preparations at their pre-Games camp in the Italian Alps.

As one of Team Ireland's partners, Key Patent Innovations understands the value of preparation, precision and performance under pressure. In this Q&A,

Angela Quinlan, Managing Director of Key Patent Innovations, talks with Nancy Chillingworth, Chef de Mission for Team Ireland, to explore what it really takes to bring an Olympic team to the start line of a Winter Games.

ANGELA

As we enter the final week before Milano Cortina, what do the last-minute preparations look like from a Chef de Mission's perspective, and where is your focus right now?

NANCY

At this stage, everything is about making sure athletes arrive at the start line fully prepared to compete. Our focus is on final selections and entries, but just as importantly on ensuring that every detail around travel, accreditation, equipment, and support services is locked in so athletes can concentrate solely on performance. Winter qualification runs right up to the final weeks, so it's an intense period, but our role is to absorb that pressure and create clarity and certainty for the athletes and coaches as they move into competition mode.

ANGEL A

How important is the pre-Games camp in Italy for Team Ireland, and what are you hoping athletes will gain from being on site ahead of competition?

NANCY

We're doing a slightly different pre-games camp this time around. The Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics were really the first time that Team Ireland had brought the winter athletes together in advance of an Olympic Games. And due to COVID, we had people bubbled for a longer period of time together. But it can be difficult to find optimum training facilities for a very diverse group of disciplines. So we made the decision this time around that actually we would provide targeted investment and funding for each athlete, just in that final phase so they could train where they needed to train and then we would limit the time spent together to just two days.

For this camp, we have worked with the Irish Consul General in Milan and the Irish Embassy in Rome to host a team event where the athletes will receive their kit, do all their photography and media work, and get an opportunity to build the team before they head off to their different villages.

ANGEL A

How do you balance creating a calm, supportive environment for athletes while also managing the pressure and unpredictability that comes with a global event of this scale?

NANCY

One of our key strengths in the OFI is really around building Team Ireland culture, ethos, what it means to be a part of Team Ireland. I always find it really interesting when it comes to winter sports, a lot of our athletes come from the Irish diaspora and there is like a really unique sort of sense of what it means to be Irish and the pride in being Irish that you get within this group. And so part of the leadership is really around harnessing that and then bringing that into our culture throughout the Games. Obviously, the focus is on performance. So our role within leadership is to ensure that we set a calm, focused environment where the athletes are enabled to perform to the very best.

The coaches are enabled to perform to their very best in their roles. And as a HQ team, we take away any of the distraction and noise that comes with an Olympic Games to support them to do that.

ANGEL A

Looking ahead to the moment competition begins, what does success look like for you as Chef de Mission, beyond medals and results?

NANCY

I guess a successful Games is one where you have a team who feel supported to achieve to their very highest. And so their reflection after the Games, if that is how they have felt and if that's how they've experienced the Games, I think that's a success.

And part of that comes down to us understanding what performance success looks like for each individual person on the team and how we respond to that. So as the same with any Olympic Games, there will be athletes where they fully expect to make a final. There will be athletes where actually qualifying for an Olympic Games is a phenomenal achievement. And so for them to then go out and achieve a personal best on the biggest stage in the world is huge. And so us understanding what that looks like for each person and reacting appropriately is vitally important.



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