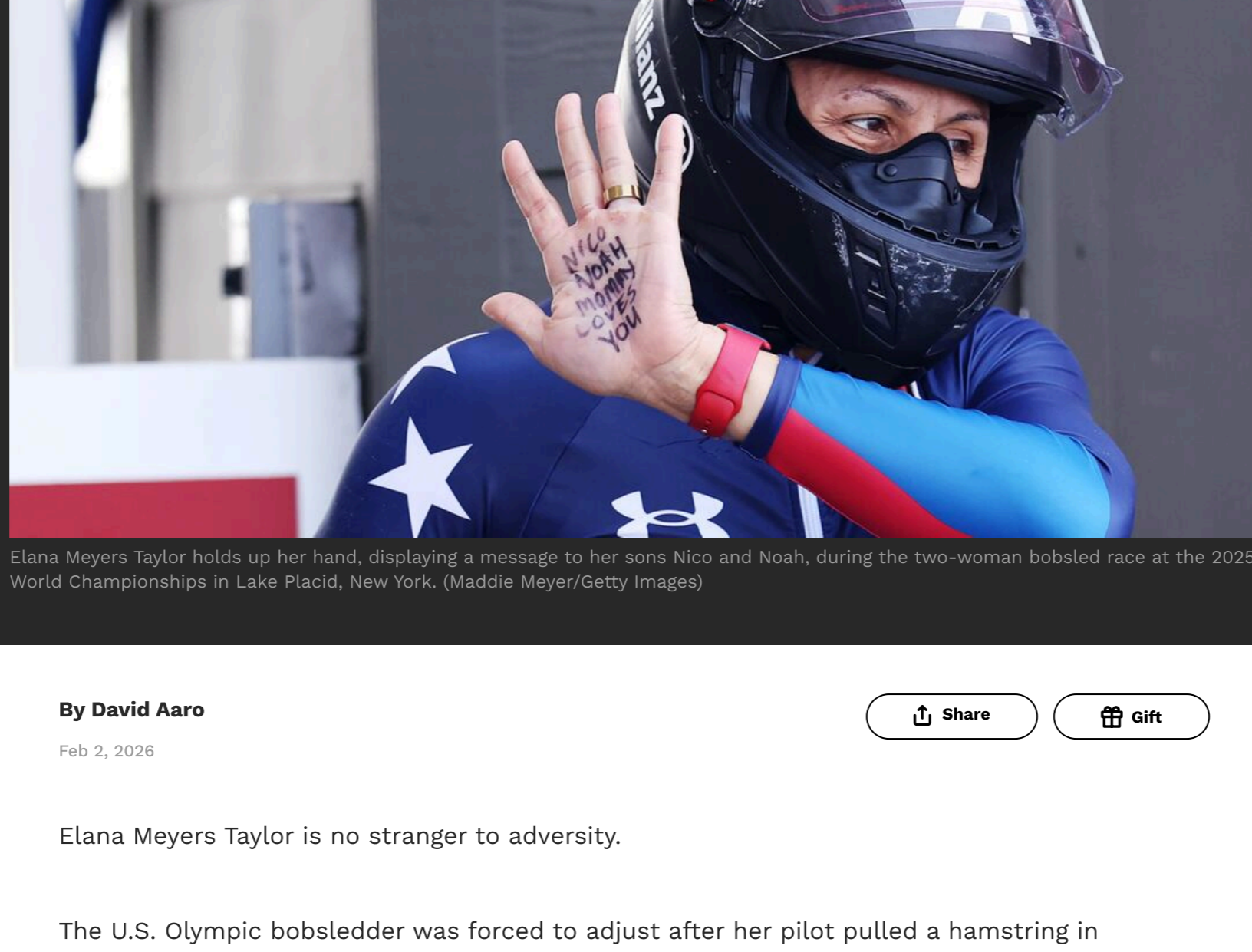


WINTER OLYMPICS

Motherhood fuels U.S. bobsled legend Elana Meyers Taylor's fifth Olympic run

This could be the final Games for the 41-year-old from Douglasville, the most decorated Black Winter Olympian in history. She now balances the rigors of the sport with taking care of her two children, who are deaf.



Elana Meyers Taylor holds up her hand, displaying a message to her sons Nico and Noah, during the two-woman bobsled race at the 2023 World Championships in Lake Placid, New York. (Maddie Meyer/Getty Images)

By David Aaro Feb 2, 2023

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Elana Meyers Taylor is no stranger to adversity.

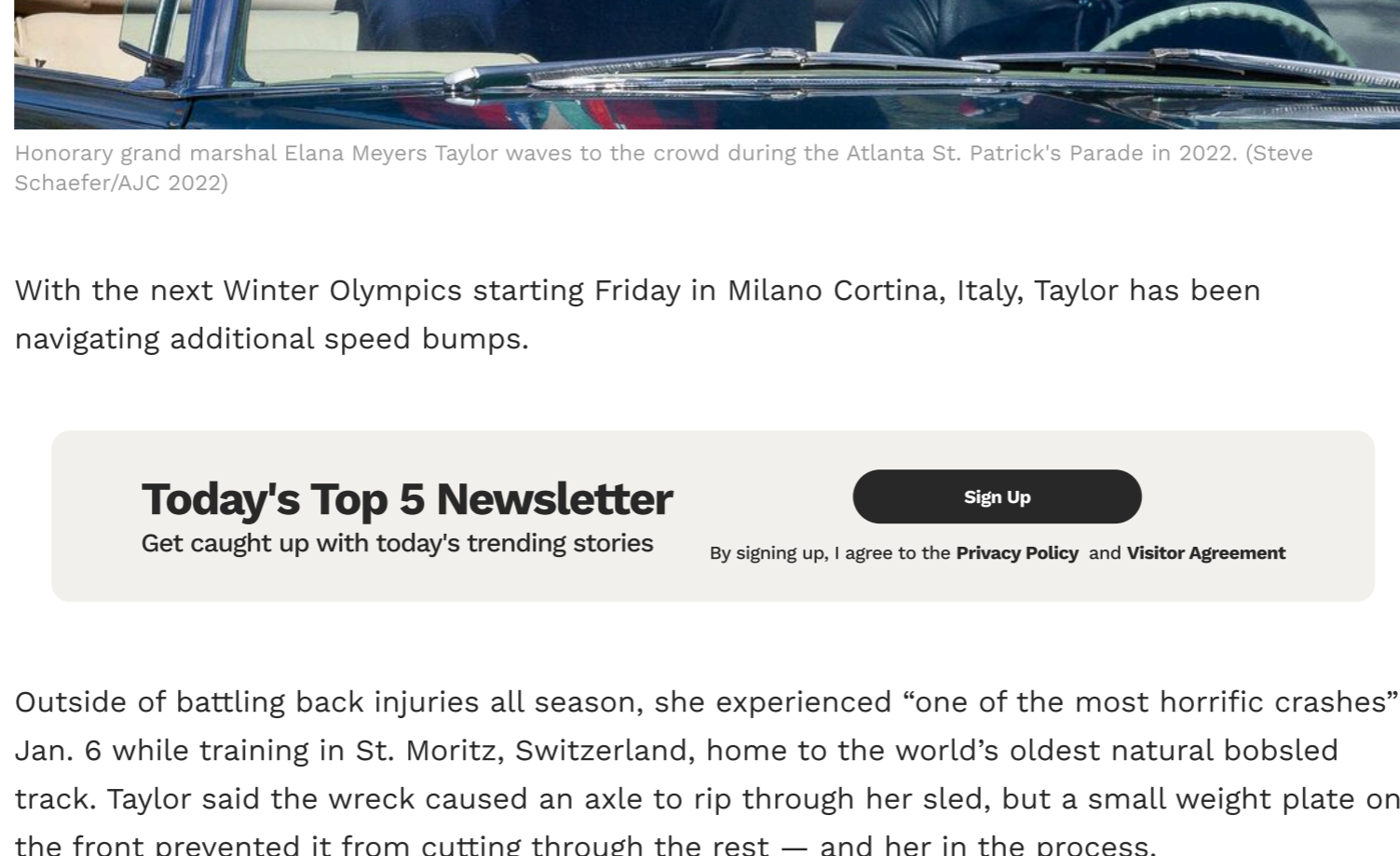
The U.S. Olympic bobsledder was forced to adjust after her pilot pulled a hamstring in Vancouver during the 2010 Winter Games, and four years later her sled broke in Sochi. She tore her Achilles tendon ahead of the 2018 Games in PyeongChang, then got COVID four years ago in Beijing.

But each time, she has somehow found a way.

Taylor earned medals in all of those Games and now stands as the most decorated Black Winter Olympian in history. Not a bad legacy for a girl from Douglasville who didn't even take a winter jacket to Lake Placid, New York, for her first bobsled event in 2007.

RELATED

At 41, Douglasville's Elana Meyers Taylor searching for her first Olympic gold



Historically blind medalist Elana Meyers Taylor waves to the crowd during the Atlanta St. Patrick's Parade in 2022. (Steve Schaefer/AJC 2022)

With the next Winter Olympics starting Friday in Milano Cortina, Italy, Taylor has been navigating additional speed bumps.

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Outside of battling back injuries all season, she experienced "one of the most horrific crashes" Jan. 8 while training in St. Moritz, Switzerland, home to the world's oldest natural bobsled track. Taylor said the wreck caused an axle to rip through her sled, but a small weight plate on the front prevented it from cutting through the rest — and her in the process.

"I think my morbid curiosity sometimes is like, OK, even whatever challenges we are presented, how can we find a way around it?" Taylor recently told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution over the phone from Altenberg, Germany. "I haven't even medaled all season, but at the end of the day, I have an unwavering belief in myself that I can pull it together when it counts the most."

Anything is possible

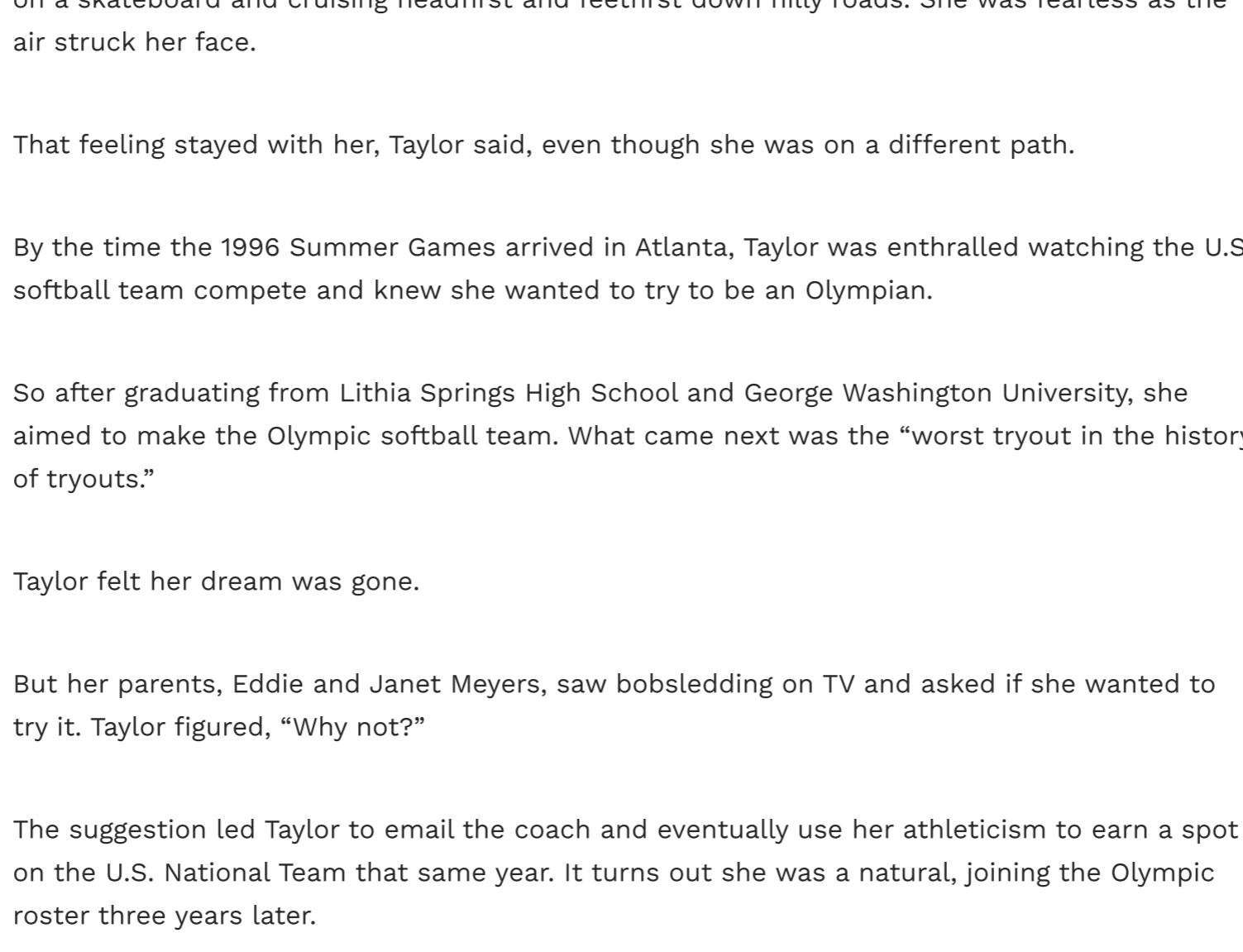
This will be the fifth Winter Games for Taylor, who has won five medals in her nearly two-decade career. By Olympic standards, the 41-year-old probably should have already hung up her aerodynamic suit to focus on post-athletic life. Taylor, who will be competing this month against women in their 20s and 30s, revealed that some of her U.S. teammates say they have been watching her since they were in elementary school.

But Taylor can't hear the closing bell. That's because something else is driving her in a final quest for the top of the podium: her two boys.

It's the first time Nico, 5, and Noah, 3, will be watching together as their mother competes for gold. Both are deaf, and Nico has Down syndrome, said Taylor, who was pregnant with Noah during the Games in Beijing.

Many people have already placed limitations on them, she said. But not their mother.

She wants to show them that anything is possible.



Elana Meyers Taylor and her husband, Nic, hold their children (from left) Noah, 3, and Nico, 5. (Courtesy of Elana Meyers Taylor)

"They live in a space where, at the ages of 3 and 5, many people have told them no, they won't be able to do X, Y and Z," Taylor said. "So I want to be the living example of how even though people tell you no, that doesn't mean you have to listen."

"The good news is," she added, "if people tell them no, they can't hear it."

Finding a dream

Growing up in metro Atlanta, where snowfall is a rarity, Taylor said she never made a makeshift sled to prepare for her future career. With no winter wonderland, she got her thrills by hopping on a skateboard and cruising headfirst and feetfirst down hilly roads. She was fearless as the air struck her face.

That feeling stayed with her, Taylor said, even though she was on a different path.

By the time the 1996 Summer Games arrived in Atlanta, Taylor was enthralled watching the U.S. softball team compete and knew she wanted to try to be an Olympian.

So after graduating from Lithia Springs High School and George Washington University, she aimed to make the Olympic softball team. What came next was the "worst tryout in the history of tryouts."

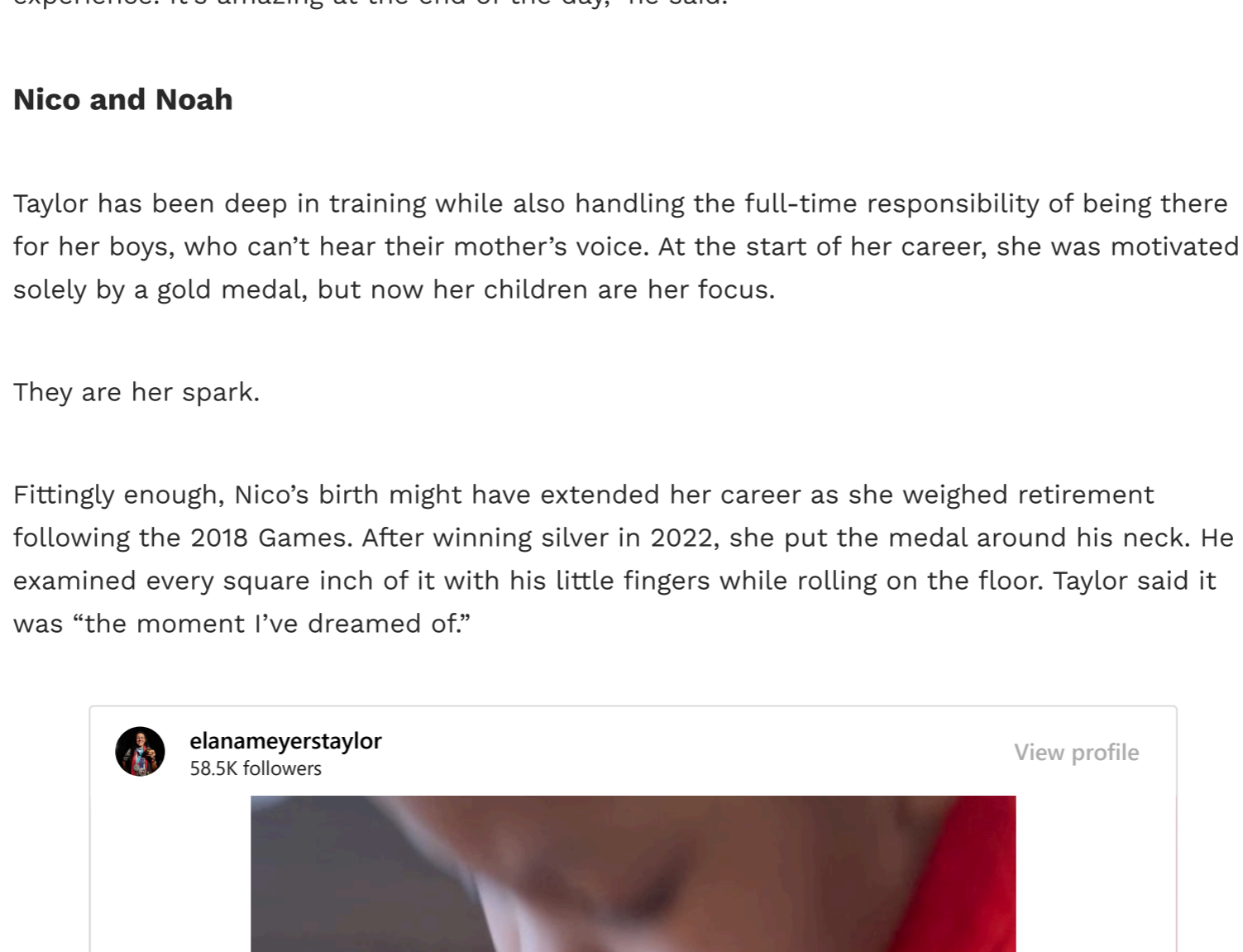
Taylor felt her dream was gone.

But her parents, Eddie and Janet Meyers, saw bobsledding on TV and asked if she wanted to try it. Taylor figured, "Why not?"

The suggestion led Taylor to email the coach and eventually use her athleticism to earn a spot on the U.S. National Team that same year. It turns out she was a natural, joining the Olympic roster three years later.

"I had taken all my daughters on a number of roller coaster rides across the country. So I said it can't be worse than some of the roller coasters you've been on," Eddie Meyers told the AJC. "And so she went and tried out. Lo and behold, 20-plus years later, here we are."

Taylor won bronze in the two-woman bobsled in 2010, silver in 2014 and silver again in 2018. In 2022, she got bronze in the two-woman and silver in the newly created women's monobob, in which she rides solo.



Elana Meyers Taylor (left) and teammate Kaillie Humphries celebrate after the women's monobob at the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing. (Pavel Golovkin/AP)

A superhero in Italy?

When the 2026 Games open Friday, Taylor is scheduled to compete again in the two-woman bobsled and the monobob. Her first training heat will be Feb. 12.

Key dates and how to watch the 2026 Winter Olympics Games. When and how to view the 2026 Winter Olympics Games in Milan-Cortina. The Games are set to run from Friday, Feb. 6 to Sunday, Feb. 22. The competitions will be livestreamed on Peacock. They will also be viewable on NBC, USA Network and CNBC and on the website NBCOlympics.com. Here are the competition dates for female bobsledding: Feb. 15: Women's monobob heats 1 and 2; Feb. 16: Women's monobob heats 3 and 4; Feb. 20: 2-woman heats 1 and 2; Feb. 21: 2-woman heats 3 and 4.

Taylor started her bobsled career as a brakewoman, but she has been a pilot in every Olympics since. She is essentially the team's quarterback, physically controlling the bobsled's path. After helping to push the sled at the start, she has to memorize every turn — at speeds that can eclipse 100 mph.

When things are going great, she said it feels like you're flying.

"You feel like a superhero, but when you're not nailing it, you're just working to get on the best line possible," said Taylor, whose teammate, Kaillie Humphries, 40, is also a mother. "Realistically, you're not on Plan A all the time, so it's usually the pilot who has the best plan B, C, D, E, F that wins the race."

Eddie Meyers can usually be found with a camera in his hand as he works to get the perfect shot of his daughter. With his eyes transfixed on the lens, he doesn't have time to get caught up in the moment, he said, even when Taylor has a great run.

But he still recalls the "overwhelming" feeling of seeing the U.S. flag raised alongside those of other countries as his daughter stood proudly on the podium.

"To see her achieve what she's been able to achieve and to bring the kids along with the experience, it's amazing at the end of the day," he said.

Nico and Noah

Taylor has been deep in training while also handling the full-time responsibility of being there for her boys, who can't hear their mother's voice. At the start of her career, she was motivated solely by a gold medal, but now her children are her focus.

They are her spark.

Fittingly enough, Nico's birth might have extended her career as she believed retirement following the 2018 Games. After winning silver in 2022, she put the medal around his neck. He examined every square inch of it with his little fingers while rolling on the floor. Taylor said it was "the moment I've dreamed of."

Instagram post by elanameyertaylor showing a photo of a young boy in a blue shirt and red scarf holding a medal.

Nico was born three weeks early in February 2020 and spent eight days in the intensive care unit at Wellstar Kennestone Hospital in Marietta. Noah was born two years later at Emory University Hospital Midtown. Their hearing loss is related to an inherited gene mutation in the family. Having multiple deaf children in one family isn't rare, typically due to genetic factors, according to medical experts.

Taylor said chaos is now her routine as she takes her boys around the world.

They require constant supervision, and teaching them is a challenge since you can't simply tell them no, especially if their backs are turned. Eddie Meyers explained. But Taylor is patient. Nico and Noah are very active and want her love every day, she said. They are her two little shadows.

It's a nonstop effort to be there for them, while still finding 10-plus hours of training each day. Since October, that has included daily test runs to handle the balance of staying safe and getting the best lines possible.

Luckily, her team members and a nanny from Georgia are there to help pick up the slack. The assistance has been instrumental, considering her husband, Nic, isn't able to travel due to his job working as a chiropractor for professional athletes, Taylor said.

"I wouldn't change it for the world," she said. "I think the coolest thing is that my sons have seen so many different countries. They've met so many different people."

Always on her mind

Taylor acknowledged that most Olympic bobsledders retire in their 30s. Due to her age, her body requires a longer recovery process, she said. But despite a season full of back injuries and unfortunate circumstances, Taylor's belief hasn't wavered.

Her Olympic goal is to finish two good races that can earn her a shot at a gold medal. While she hasn't decided if this will be her last Olympics, she noted that "Father Time is undefeated."

"I felt like I needed to take that chance and give it one last go, and even if it doesn't result in gold medals, then I'll be OK," Taylor said.

Elana Meyers Taylor and Jasmine Jones of the U.S. finish their second run during the two-woman bobsled during an Olympic test event in Cortina D'Ampezzo, Italy, on Nov. 23. (Andrew Medichini/AP)

If she makes the podium again, Taylor might yell in excitement. But her unspoken gestures will be more important in that moment.

During the World Championships at Lake Placid in March, she held up her left hand, which had "Nico, Noah, Mommy loves you" written in black magic marker. Her father said Taylor constantly does things like that for the boys, who are always on her mind.

Taylor said she also uses that hand to make another gesture in sign language whenever she wins a race — or sees Nico and Noah smiling first thing in the morning. She extends her thumb, index finger and pinky finger while keeping the remaining two fingers down.

That needs no interpretation: "I love you."

About the Author

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David Aaro is a breaking news reporter for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

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