

I remember my second jump at Calgary so clearly." Michael 'Eddie the Eagle' Edwards' eyes (now surgically corrected and glasses-free) glaze over with the sheer nostalgia of it all. "I was at the top of the run and I heard the crowd begin to chant. 'E-ddie. E-ddie. E-ddie.' Ninety-thousand people shouting your name, can you imagine? There were still about 10 jumpers to go before me and they were all smiling and having a bit of a laugh about it, encouraging me. And all I could think was: 'Shiiiiiiiit!'"

Edwards is, of course, looking back to the 1988 Winter Games, when he became the first-ever British ski jumper to take part in an Olympic competition and promptly shot, or rather plopped, to fame by coming last. Twice. It was the year the redheaded, bespectacled, 24-year old Cheltonian got his nickname, Eddie the Eagle, and became the first, and only, athlete to be individually named in an Olympic closing ceremony speech. He's been diming out on it ever since.

Now aged 46, Edwards is a plasterer and builder with a sideline in property development. Construction is not new to him.

He was one in a long line of builders in his family, way before he became Eddie the Eagle, working for his Dad's plastering and roofing business, along with his uncles and his brother. Back then, as a teenager, his life was a strange mix of construction work in the summer and ski training in Europe and the US in the winter. In many ways, after the whirlwind years following Calgary, his life has come full circle as today he fits running a small building firm in Gloucestershire around his other work – making public appearances, starring in TV adverts and, if it comes off as planned by the end of the year, being involved in the production of a film about his life.

On the day the 2010 Winter Olympics kicked off in Vancouver, Building went to visit Mr E Eagle to ask him, belatedly, about those Olympic performances, how he balances a life of construction and celebrity and why he thinks the 2012 London Games will be a complete waste of money.

1988: speed skier to jumper

The Snowzone, Milton Keynes' indoor ski slope, may be a million miles away from the excitement of the Winter

Olympics in Vancouver, but Edwards doesn't care. He is sitting there in his bright red ski jacket, eating a chunk of Dairy Milk chocolate broken from a huge family-sized bar stashed in his top pocket. Nothing, he says, can quash his enthusiasm for the winter Games: "I just love them," he beams. "They're my thing."

Unfair though it may sound, many would argue that, in fact, they really aren't his thing. Although he is an impressive downhill skier – he was once the world number nine – ski jumping was something Edwards embarked on out of necessity rather than because it was a natural talent. A self-funded mission to compete in the 1988

HOW MANY VELODROMES DO WE NEED IN THE WORLD? IT'S NOT THAT POPULAR A SPORT AND SOON ENOUGH WE'RE GOING TO HAVE ONE IN EVERY BLOODY COUNTRY

Eddie the Eagle, aka Michael Edwards, soared to international stardom when he flopped in the 1988 Winter Olympics ski jumping event. After the glow faded, he finally came back to earth as a Gloucestershire builder. **Emily Wright** asked him about a life of brilliant improvisation

WINGING IT

Winter Olympics involved a decision to move out to Lake Placid in the US to train for the downhill skiing event. Before he could attempt to qualify, Edwards ran out of money and, rather than give up, switched his discipline to ski jumping, which was cheaper. "I was always scared right from the first jump I did and I was scared when I did every one of my 86,000 jumps. But it was important – I was scared enough to concentrate on what I was doing, but not scared enough that I wouldn't do it."

Although he insists that his jumps in Calgary, though not his best, were still British world records, the truth remains that, compared with his fellow competitors, Edwards' performance made him famous for all the wrong reasons. He weighed about 20lb more than the next heaviest competitor and had to wear his glasses – which steamed up and impaired his vision – when he jumped. As a result, he came last in both the 70m and 90m jumps.

Bizarrely, perhaps, Edwards' performance saw him become an overnight celebrity and in the three years following the 1988 Games, his feet didn't touch the ground. "I think there were two moments that made me realise just how much my life had changed. One was at the closing ceremony when I was singled out. I stood up and waved and 100,000 people went bananas. The guy had to stop his speech for about 10 minutes to let the cheering die down. It was a very surprising moment. And a lovely one. The hairs on my neck still stand on end when I think about it.

"Then there was the moment I landed at Heathrow coming back to the UK after the Games and about 30 policemen came up to me to escort me through customs. I couldn't work out why until I walked into arrivals and the crowd was overwhelming. From then on I was being flown by private jet and helicopter here there and everywhere. And I was earning very good money – £10,000 an hour. It was fun." ©

