



WHERE DID THE OLYMPIC GAMES BEGIN?

The Olympic Games Began in Greece

The Ancient Greeks held athletic competitions in **Olympia** in the Peloponnese. The first written records of these events date back to 776BC.

The Games took place every four years, and were dedicated to ZEUS, the king of the gods.

They were open only to free man of Greek citizenship, which meant slaves; women and foreign men were unable to take part. In fact, women were not even allowed to watch the events.

A few months before the competitions began, a sacred truce was proclaimed. This truce ordered the immediate states. Messengers travelled throughout the country urging everyone to lay down their arms. The truce allowed athletics and spectators to travel to the competition in safety.

Games were also held in honour of the gods at sites other than **Olympia**: in **Nemea** for Zeus (as in Olympia), in **Delphi** for Apollo and in the **Isthmia** for Poseidon. The Games held on these four different sites are known collectively as the **Panhellenic Games**.

The Ancient Games lasted for more than 1000 years! Over such a long period, the program evolved and the sports included in it varied considerably. After enjoying significant popularity, the Games gradually began to lose their prestige.

Their deathblow was dealt by the Byzantine emperor Theodosius 1st. A convert to Christianity, he would not tolerate pagan events within his Empire, and abolished them in 393AD.

Information about the ancient Games can be discovered by examining a training scene painted on a vase, the sculpture of an athlete, or a few verses composed to the glory of an athletic victor, artists, potters, writers, historians and poets of the time have left behind invaluable testimonies, all of which provide us with ways to learn about the Ancient Games.



WHO FOUNDED THE MODERN OLYMPIC GAMES?

The modern Games were founded by the Baron Pierre de Coubertin, a Frenchman. To understand his actions, one has to understand something of the times in which he lived.

When, in the 18th century, Archaeologist discovered the site of the Olympia, a great deal of interest in the Games of ancient times was kindled. During the 19th century, several attempts were made to revive the Games: in Grenoble (France), Much Wenlock (Great Britain) and Athens (Greece), for example. These, however remained local events without any lasting influence in the wider world.

Coubertin, born in 1863 was very interested in these Games of the past. He also took a keen interest in the English education system, which included sport in the school curriculum, something unheard of at the time in France.

Coubertin, inspired by his first-hand research in English and American schools, wanted to make his contemporaries understand the benefits of sport for young people. Not everyone shared his views.

The baron needed some particularly convincing arguments to change people's mind. Then the French visionary and lover of Greek culture had an extraordinary idea: to revive of the Olympic Games.

Why did Coubertin succeed where so many others had failed? His genius was to immediately give the Games and international dimension, and to see them as part of a wider strategy of education through sport.

Coubertin was sincere in his convictions, had faith in his vision, and persevered despite several reversals of fortune. He achieved his goal with the creation of the International Olympic Committee in Paris on 23 June 1894, and with the celebration of the first Olympic Games of the modern era in Athens in 1896.

The baron's interest were not limited to Olympism Coubertin was a historian, writer and educator, and liked to express his opinions on a wide range of subjects.



AND THE OLYMPIC GAMES SINCE 1896?

Ever since Athens in 1896 the Olympic Games have a quadrennial meeting for the world's athletes

The Games are held **every four years**, each time in a different city around the globe. This four-yearly interval is called an Olympiad. The Summer Games, as they are often called, are in fact the **Games of the Olympiad**.

In just over a century of existence, the Olympics have evolved with society in which they take place. Current affairs help to shape the identity of the Games; just the Olympics leave their mark on the World around them.

The participation of **women** is one of the features of the modern Olympic Games. They participated for the first time in 1900 Games in Parisian the sports of tennis and golf. Women very quickly established footholds in the rest of the program rest of the Today, there are hardly any sports that remain an exclusively male preserve.

What about the Olympic Winter Games?

The first Winter Games were held in **Chamonix** in **1924**. The growth of sports played on snow and ice justified the creation of Games devoted exclusively to winter sports. Prior to 1924, figure skating competitions had been included in the program of the Games of the Olympiad, in London in 1908 and Antwerp in 1920. The Antwerp Games also saw the inclusion of first ice hockey world championships.

The Winter Games initially took place during the same year as the Games of the Olympiad. From 1992 onwards, the summer and Winter games have alternate every two years.

Looking at photographs and films of past Olympic Games, it is clear that many Changes have taken place! The Games'

Format the sporting venues, the athletes' equipment and clothing – all now differ radically from the early days.



WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE FIVE OLYMPIC RINGS?

The five rings that make up the Olympic symbol represents the union of five continents and the meeting of athletes from all over the world during the Games.

The rings symbolise the universality of the Olympic Movement.

The rings are interlocking and arranged in a trapezoid shape. The colours of the rings are:
Blue, black, red, yellow, green.

Pierre de Coubertin first proposed this symbol at the 1914 Olympic congress in Paris.

The five rings on a white background form the Olympic Flag which was unveiled during the same congress. The flag entered the Olympic Games history at Antwerp in 1920, where it flew for the first time in an Olympic stadium.

If the number of rings represents the continents, the colours (six of them, counting the white back-ground) were chosen to ensure that **every country** would have **at least one of the colours in its national flag** included.

At the time of the Games, the rings are everywhere: they appear on the clothes, hats, and bags (and even sometimes on the faces!) of Olympic participants and public alike. Through the rings, athletes and spectators are united under the same banner.



WHAT IS THE OLYMPIC MOTTO?

The Olympic motto consists of three Latin words:

CITIUS ALTIUS FORTIUS

which means

FASTER, HIGHER, STRONGER

It was a friend of Coubertin, the Dominican father Henri Didon, a teacher at a school in Arcueil (France) who coined the motto. He used it to encourage his pupils in their sporting endeavours. Coubertin adopted it and made it the Motto of the Olympic Movement.

The Olympic motto sums up the attitude an athlete has to have in order to achieve his or her objective. Athletes have to push themselves in order to **reach and surpass their goals**. The idea is not so much to finish first, but to **explore one's potential**, to give the **best of oneself** and to treat this as a victory in itself.

In this sense, the Olympic motto does not just apply to athletes. It applies equally to ordinary men and women in their everyday lives.



WHY IS THERE A TORCH RELAY?

The torch relay creates a link between the ancient Games and modern Olympics.

Several months before the opening of the Games, a flame is kindled in Olympia, in Greece. This flame is then carried in a relay to the city is hosting the Games. The route varies depending on the destination. The torch may be carried across oceans, mountains and deserts, through cities and villages.

The lighting ceremony in Olympia features actresses in the role of ancient Greek priestesses. The heat of the sun is focused in a parabolic mirror and this produces a flame. Once lit, the flame is given to the first relay runner holding the official torch of the Games.

A variety of modes of transport may be used within the same relay. As well as runners on foot, the flame can also travel by plane, car and horse to cite just a few of the most common examples.

The route of the torch relay is carefully chosen. In the host country of the Games, the flame generally travels a route that maximises exposure to the inhabitants and their customs, and takes in important natural or historical sites.

On its travels, the Olympic flame is met with **great enthusiasm by the public**. The Flame announces the coming celebration of the Olympic Games and conveys a message of **peace and friendship**.

The entry of the flame into the Olympic Stadium is one of the highlights of the opening ceremony. The identity of the final torch bearer is kept a secret. This person has the honour of lighting this **cauldron** in which the Olympic flame will burn throughout the Games.



WHY ARE THERE OPENING AND CLOSING CEREMONIES AT THE OLYMPICS?

The beginning and the end of the Olympic Games are marked by ceremonies.

These events provide an unparalleled illustration of the Olympic values, and are one of the elements that make the Olympics stand apart from other sports events. Both a celebration of sport and culture and a showcase for universality and peace, the ceremonies make up a ritual that symbolises the unity of body and mind.

The opening ceremonies begin with the **official component**.

Pride of place is given to the protagonists of the Games the **Athletes!** They line up behind their Country's flag and parade in front of the spectators. As a tribute to the origins of the Games, Greece traditionally leads the parade. The host country delegation is the last to enter the stadium.

After the head of state of the host Country has declared the Games open, the Olympic anthem is played and the Olympic Flag is brought in. The flag, which is usually carried by athletes, is then hoisted on the flagpole.

The arrival of the **flame** and the lighting of the cauldron are the highlights of the ceremony. A symbolic release of doves represents the hope for peace during the games.

Since the Games of the Olympiad in Antwerp in 1920, an athlete has sworn the Olympic oath on behalf of all the participants. Since 1972 a judge has also done the same for the officials.

The official ceremony is followed by an artistic program featuring colourful costumes, dancing, singing, and music. The creativity and imagination of the artistic directors glows in the light of a magnificent fireworks display.

Whether seated in the stadium or in their favourite armchair in front of the television, spectators, around the world join in the party atmosphere!

The end of the Games is marked by the closing ceremony on the last day of the competition. The athletes parade together, rather than by delegation, in accordance with a tradition that started in Melbourne in 1956. The Olympic Flag is handed over to Mayor of the host city of the next Olympic Games. Although the flame is extinguished a promise is made to meet in four years time.



WHAT IS AN OLYMPIC SPORT?

Foot races, the discus throw, the javelin throw, the long jump, combat sports (such as wrestling and boxing) and equestrian competitions (chariots and horseback races) were on the program of the ancient Olympic Games.

Although most of the ancient sports feature in some form in the modern Olympic Games, the program has undergone some major changes in just over a century of existence.

Sports may become Olympic Sports only if they fulfill certain conditions. In order to be accepted on the program of the Summer Games, men's sports must be practiced in at least 75 countries and on four continents, whereas women's sport must be practiced in at least 40 countries and 3 continents. For the Winter Games, men's and women's sport must be practiced in at least 25 countries and on 3 continents.

An Olympic sport can be split into two subcategories: disciplines and events. A discipline is a branch of a sport that includes one or more events. An event is a competition in an Olympic sport or in one of its disciplines which results in a ranking and gives rise to an award of diplomas.

Examples:

In the Summer Games the sport of Wrestling includes two disciplines: Freestyle and Greco-Roman. In the Winter Games, snowboarding is not a sport, but a discipline of skiing. Snowboarding includes two events: Giant slalom and half pipe.

In Olympic history, many sports and events have come and gone like cricket, rugby, tug of war and underwater swimming. Others have been adopted, such as triathlon, taekwondo and curling. Some have been reintroduced after having been dropped, as was the case for tennis, archery, and skeleton.

It is the IOC who decides whether a sport can be included in the program of the Games. It sets the Olympic program, and accepts or refuses new sports, disciplines and events.

However, it is the International Federation that governs each sport which is responsible for all the technical details, rules, equipment, playing grounds, refereeing etc.



HOW DOES AN ATHLETE GET TO THE OLYMPIC GAMES?

In order to participate in the Olympic Games, athletes must comply with the Olympic Charter and follow the rules of the International Federation (IF) governing their sport.

The IFs organise the qualification events while the National Olympic Committee (NOC) is responsible for entering the athletes for the Games.

If an athlete has dual nationality he or she may compete for the country of his or her choice. However, if they have already represented one country at the Olympics or other major sports; event, they may not compete for the other country until a period of three years has elapsed.

There is no age limit for competing in the Olympics except for one which may be imposed by individual IFs for health reasons.

By entering the Olympic Games athletes make a commitment to respect the Olympic values. They agree to undergo doping test.

Athletes wishing to be entered for the Olympic Games must be exceptional in their sport. In order to reach this level, they must submit to long hours of training have a competitive spirit and feel a desire

To pit themselves against others being selected for the Olympics is the ultimate goal for the majority of athletes.



WHERE DO THE ATHLETES LIVE DURING THE GAMES?

During the two weeks of the Games, athletes live in the Olympic Village.

In the early days, athletes had to find their own accommodation and make their own catering arrangements. They were housed in hotels, schools, military barracks and even on boats.

As the Olympics grew, so did the number of participants and it became a matter of urgency to find a more appropriate solution.

The first attempt to lodge athletes in the same locations dates back to the 1924 Games in Paris, when temporary huts were made available. It was not however until Los Angeles in 1932 that the first real Olympic Village was built.

The advantage of such villages is that athletes have access to everything they need: shops, post offices, cinemas, cultural centre and of course restaurants.

The catering requirements are enormous (1044 tonnes of food for the 1988 Games in Nagano) and the menus must be varied enough to satisfy the tastes of athletes from the five continents.

The Village is provided with a high degree of security and only persons with a special accreditation can get in. The 1932 Olympic Village was patrolled by cowboys on horseback who lassoed any intruders!

Originally, the Olympic Villages were reserved for men. It was not until the 1956 Games in Melbourne that women were also able to take advantage of them.

After the Games, the Olympic Village begins a second life. The apartments are generally sold on or let for a modest rent.



HOW ARE THE WINNERS REWARDED?

In the ancient Panhellenic Games Victors were rewarded with wreaths of olive, celery, laurel or pine. In the modern Olympics Games the three best athletes of each event are honoured with medals of gold, silver or bronze.

Before the rules were defined, there were some variations in the prizes awarded to the winners; there were no gold medals at the 1896 Games in Athens. The winner received a silver medal and the runner up a bronze medal. In 1900 the Paris Games took place at the same time as the Universal Exposition. Winners were rewarded not with medals but rather with commemorative plaques or works of art! It was not until the 1908 Games in London that medals became standardised.

The medals for the Games of the Olympiad must meet the standards set by the IOC. From 1928 to 1968, one face bore a representation of Nike the Goddess of victory, while the other showed an athlete being carried along the shoulders of the crowd.

From 1972 onwards, it was decided that one face should continue to show the goddess of victory, while the design of the other was left up to the host city.

The Winter Games and medals are not subject to the same constraints. The organising committee is free to choose a different design for each Games.

These medals tend to be more imaginative in their designs, incorporating a variety of materials such as crystal, granite and lacquer.

The podium used for the medal presentation ceremony, made its first appearance at the Lake Placid Games in 1932.

The presentation ceremony is always a moving event. Although the time the athletes spend on the podium is short compared with the time it took for them to there, the admiration of the public amplifies the victory of these heroes and heroines, and gives them perhaps their sweetest reward.