The modern **Olympic Games** or **Olympics** (French: *Jeux olympiques*)[[a]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-1)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-2) are the leading international sporting events featuring summer and winter sports competitions in which thousands of [athletes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athletes) from around the world participate in a [variety of competitions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multi-sport_event). The Olympic Games are considered the world's foremost sports competition with more than 200 teams, representing sovereign states and territories, participating.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-EB-3) The Olympic Games are normally held every [four years](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympiad), and since [1994](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1994_Winter_Olympics), have alternated between the [Summer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Summer_Olympic_Games) and [Winter Olympics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winter_Olympic_Games) every two years during the four-year period.

Their creation was inspired by the [ancient Olympic Games](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Olympic_Games) ([Ancient Greek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek_language): Ὀλυμπιακοί Ἀγῶνες), held in [Olympia, Greece](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympia,_Greece) from the 8th century BC to the 4th century AD. [Baron Pierre de Coubertin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_de_Coubertin) founded the [International Olympic Committee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Olympic_Committee) (IOC) in 1894, leading to the first modern Games in Athens in 1896. The IOC is the governing body of the [Olympic Movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Movement) (which encompasses all entities and individuals involved in the Olympic Games) with the [Olympic Charter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Charter) defining its structure and authority.

The evolution of the Olympic Movement during the 20th and 21st centuries has resulted in several changes to the Olympic Games. Some of these adjustments include the creation of the Winter Olympic Games for snow and ice sports, the [Paralympic Games](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paralympic_Games) for athletes with disabilities, the [Youth Olympic Games](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youth_Olympic_Games) for athletes aged 14 to 18, the five Continental games ([Pan American](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pan_American_Games), [African](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_Games), [Asian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asian_Games), [European](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Games), and [Pacific](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacific_Games)), and the [World Games](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Games) for sports that are not contested in the Olympic Games. The IOC also endorses the [Deaflympics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deaflympics) and the [Special Olympics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Olympics). The IOC has needed to adapt to a variety of economic, political, and technological advancements. The [abuse of amateur rules](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#Amateurism_and_professionalism) by the [Eastern Bloc](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Bloc) nations prompted the IOC to shift away from pure [amateurism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amateur_sports), as envisioned by Coubertin, to the acceptance of [professional athletes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Professional_athlete) participating at the Games. The growing importance of mass media has created the issue of [corporate sponsorship](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sponsor_(commercial)) and general commercialisation of the Games. [World wars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_war) led to the cancellation of the [1916](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1916_Summer_Olympics), [1940](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1940_Summer_Olympics), and [1944](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1944_Summer_Olympics) Olympics; large-scale boycotts during the [Cold War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_War) limited participation in the [1980](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1980_Summer_Olympics) and [1984](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1984_Summer_Olympics) Olympics;[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-olympic.org-4) and the [2020](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020_Summer_Olympics) Olympics were postponed until 2021 as a result of the [COVID-19 pandemic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic).

The Olympic Movement consists of [international sports federations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_international_sports_federations) (IFs), [National Olympic Committees](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Olympic_Committee) (NOCs), and organising committees for each specific Olympic Games. As the decision-making body, the IOC is responsible for choosing the host city for each Games, and organises and funds the Games according to the Olympic Charter. The IOC also determines the Olympic programme, consisting of the [sports](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_sports) to be contested at the Games. There are several Olympic rituals and symbols, such as the [Olympic flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_flag) and [torch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Flame#Torches), as well as the [opening and closing ceremonies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games_ceremony). Over 14,000 athletes competed at the [2020 Summer Olympics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020_Summer_Olympics) and [2022 Winter Olympics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_Winter_Olympics) combined, in 40 different sports and 448 events.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-5)[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-6) The first-, second-, and third-place finishers in each event receive [Olympic medals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_medal): gold, silver, and bronze, respectively.

The Games have grown so much that nearly every nation is now represented; colonies and overseas territories are allowed to field their own teams. This growth has created numerous challenges and [controversies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games_scandals_and_controversies), including [boycotts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Olympic_Games_boycotts), [doping](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Use_of_performance-enhancing_drugs_in_the_Olympic_Games), bribery, and terrorism. Every two years, the Olympics and its media exposure provide athletes with the chance to attain national and sometimes international fame. The Games also provide an opportunity for the host city and country to showcase themselves to the world.

Ancient Olympics

The Ancient Olympic Games were religious and athletic festivals held every four years at the sanctuary of [Zeus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeus) in [Olympia, Greece](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympia,_Greece). Competition was among representatives of several [city-states](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City-state) and kingdoms of [Ancient Greece](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greece). These Games featured mainly athletic but also combat sports such as wrestling and the [pankration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pankration), horse and chariot racing events. It has been widely written that during the Games, all conflicts among the participating city-states were postponed until the Games were finished. This cessation of hostilities was known as the Olympic peace or truce.[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-Swaddling_2000_p54-7) This idea is a modern myth because the Greeks never suspended their wars. The truce did allow those religious pilgrims who were travelling to Olympia to pass through warring territories unmolested because they were protected by Zeus.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-8)

The origin of the Olympics is shrouded in mystery and legend;[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-FOOTNOTEYoung200412-9) one of the most popular myths identifies [Heracles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heracles) and his father [Zeus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeus) as the progenitors of the Games.[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-elis1-7-9-10)[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-FOOTNOTERichardson1992227-11)[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-FOOTNOTEYoung200412%E2%80%9313-12) According to legend, it was Heracles who first called the Games "Olympic" and established the custom of holding them every four years.[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-elis1-7-7-13) The myth continues that after Heracles completed his [twelve labours](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labours_of_Hercules), he built the [Olympic Stadium](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Stadium) as an honour to Zeus. Following its completion, he walked in a straight line for 200 steps and called this distance a "[stadion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stadion_(unit_of_length)" \o "Stadion (unit of length))" (Ancient Greek: στάδιον, [Latin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin): *stadium*, "stage"), which later became a [unit of distance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stadion_(unit_of_length)). The most widely accepted inception date for the Ancient Olympics is 776 BC; this is based on inscriptions, found at Olympia, listing the winners of a footrace held every four years starting in 776 BC.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-14) The Ancient Games featured running events, a pentathlon (consisting of a jumping event, [discus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discus_throw) and javelin throws, a foot race, and wrestling), boxing, wrestling, [pankration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pankration), and [equestrian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equestrianism) events.[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-FOOTNOTECrowther200759%E2%80%9361-15)[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-16) Tradition has it that [Coroebus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coroebus_of_Elis" \o "Coroebus of Elis), a cook from the city of [Elis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elis_(city)), was the first Olympic champion.[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-FOOTNOTEGolden200924-17)

The Olympics were of fundamental religious importance, featuring sporting events alongside ritual sacrifices honouring both Zeus (whose [famous statue](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statue_of_Zeus_at_Olympia) by [Phidias](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phidias) stood in his temple at [Olympia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympia,_Greece)) and [Pelops](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pelops), divine hero and mythical king of Olympia. Pelops was famous for his chariot race with King [Oenomaus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oenomaus) of [Pisatis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pisa,_Greece" \o "Pisa, Greece).[[17]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurkert198395-18) The winners of the events were admired and immortalised in poems and statues.[[18]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-FOOTNOTESwaddling199990%E2%80%9393-19) The Games were held every four years, and this period, known as an [Olympiad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympiad), was used by Greeks as one of their units of time measurement. The Games were part of a cycle known as the [Panhellenic Games](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panhellenic_Games), which included the [Pythian Games](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pythian_Games), the [Nemean Games](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nemean_Games), and the [Isthmian Games](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isthmian_Games).[[19]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-20)

The Olympic Games reached the height of their success in the 6th and 5th centuries BC, but then gradually declined in importance as the [Romans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Rome) gained power and influence in Greece. While there is no scholarly consensus as to when the Games officially ended, the most commonly held date is 393 AD, when the emperor [Theodosius I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodosius_I) decreed that all pagan cults and practices be eliminated.[[b]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-22) Another date commonly cited is 426 AD, when his successor, [Theodosius II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodosius_II), ordered the destruction of all Greek temples.[[21]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games#cite_note-FOOTNOTECrowther200754-23)