

The Glory of Athletics: From Athlete to Nation

An Analysis of The History of The Olympic Games

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Overview:

Today, the Olympics are one of the most widely watched events on TV. With over 19.8 million people watching NBC's primetime coverage of PyeongChang last year, it is no mystery that the Olympics are a worldwide loved event. From the beginning of the Olympic Games in 1896 to the Games in 2016, the number of athletes, both male and female, coming from all around the world have continued to dramatically increase.

The Games began in Ancient Greece almost 3,000 years ago as an essential part of a religious festival held in honor of Zeus. Held at the Olympia, the Olympics became one of the four Greek festivals that achieved importance in Greek culture, spreading to 150 cities years later.¹ The Olympics were founded on the basis of culture and community, intending to bring people together as a part of a religious festival and to benefit the people. The Games began as one of four "classical games" that "achieved major importance"². As the Games began to spread around nearby cities, the status of the games began to grow until they held "such an important place in Greek history that in late antiquity historians measured time by the interval between them [Olympics]--an Olympiad"³. All of the competitions began as a one day event, later extending to become a festival lasting four days with the fifth day designated as a celebration and closing ceremony. At the ceremony, prizes were given and were followed by a party held for the champions. The champions were given lavish benefits for winning upon return to their cities, helping to create strong sentiments for their cities and nation as a whole.

Despite the growing support for the games and its development to include an increasing number of events, the loss of Greek independence in the mid second century BCE also meant a loss of the Olympic Games and the loss of culture. However, hundreds of years later, the Olympics began again. After spending time studying with Dr. William Penny Brookes, an ardent advocate for the revival of the Olympics, Pierre baron de Coubertin, a physical educationist, decided to

¹ Young, David C., and Harold Maurice Abrahams. "Olympic Games." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 28 Feb. 2018, www.britannica.com/sports/Olympic-Games.

² IBID

³ IBID

push for the idea of a new beginning for the Olympics while at a meeting of the Union des Sports Athlétiques in Paris on November 25th, 1892⁴. He spoke to the group to “Let us export our oarsmen, our runners, our fencers into other lands. That is the true Free Trade of the future; and the day it is introduced into Europe the cause of Peace will have received a new and strong ally”⁵. In his efforts, he pleaded to the people to help him with “the splendid and beneficent task of reviving the Olympic Games”⁶. After the speech failed to generate any support for the movement, he advertised his idea again in 1894 at a conference on international support in Paris. At the end of the conference a unanimous vote to bring the games back pushed to restart the games in 1896 in Athens, reminiscent of the first games ever held.

Now, 120 years later, the importance and culture of the Olympic Games has grown to a level no one could have ever expected during the first years in Greece. What nations succeed in the games? What kind of athletes succeed? Where do athletes come from? To look at these questions and so many more I had on my mind, I analyzed both characteristics of the Olympic Games as a whole, and of the athletes that make the games possible. In my research, I found that the winter games and summer games both hold their own characteristics of countries and athletes that do well. In this document, I will show some of the data that I found.

The Data:

One of the first things I was interested in looking into was the question of which nations are the most successful in the Olympics. I decided to look into the number of medals won, and more specifically what kinds of medals, across different nations and try to use that data to infer which countries are “successful.” Below, the two figures show the top medaling countries in both the winter and summer games separately. One of the most interesting findings from this data is that the countries that are successful not only change by season, but that the countries that are winning the most medals also changes. For example, the winter games have many nations winning a lot of medals, whereas in the summer games only one nation is incredibly successful.

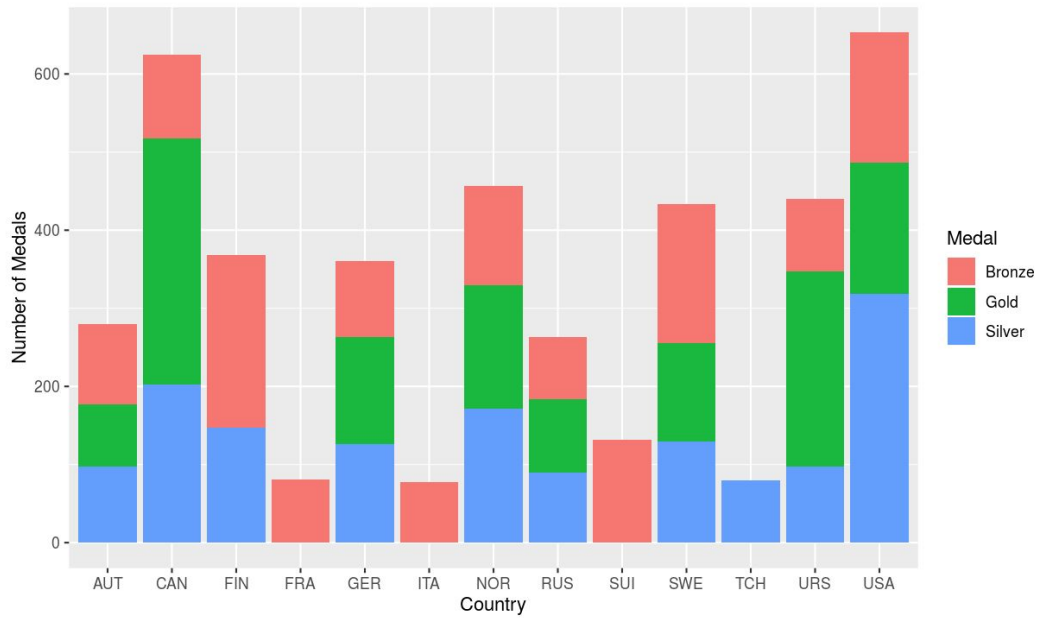
⁴ IBID

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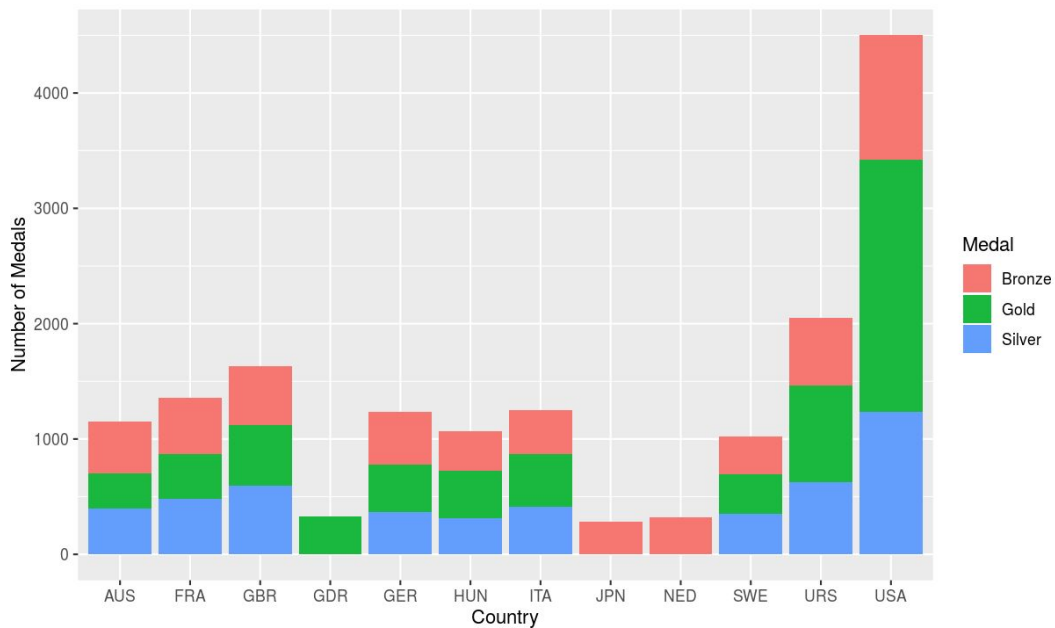
The Top Medaling Countries: Winter Olympic Games

Which Countries Over Time Have Succeeded The Most?



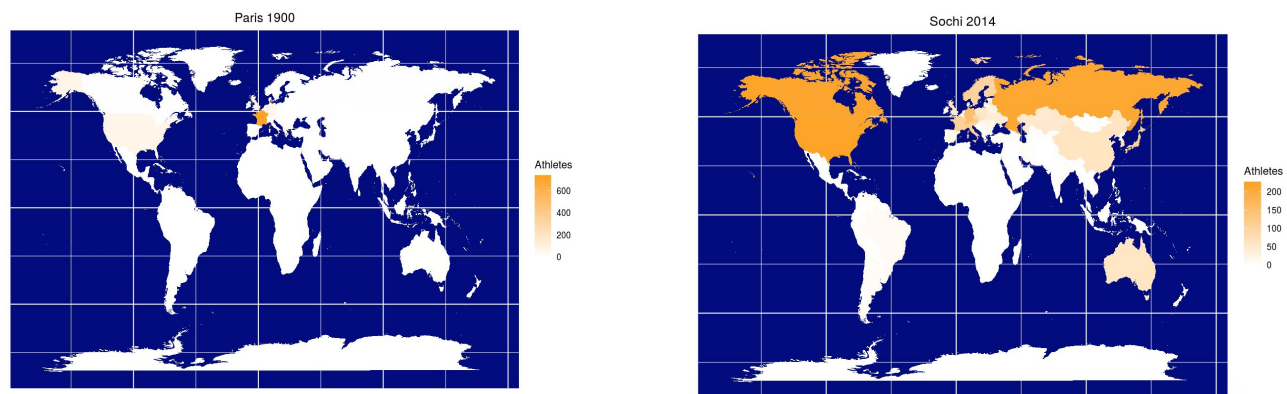
The Top Medaling Countries: Summer Olympic Games

Which Countries Over Time Have Succeeded The Most?



After exploring data from the nations and the medals they won, I looked into more data regarding the Olympics as a whole. I looked into overall athlete, event, and nation trends that plotted the number of each over time per season. I also explored both the winter and summer games separately looking into the ages of the typical medal winners and how that changed over the years.

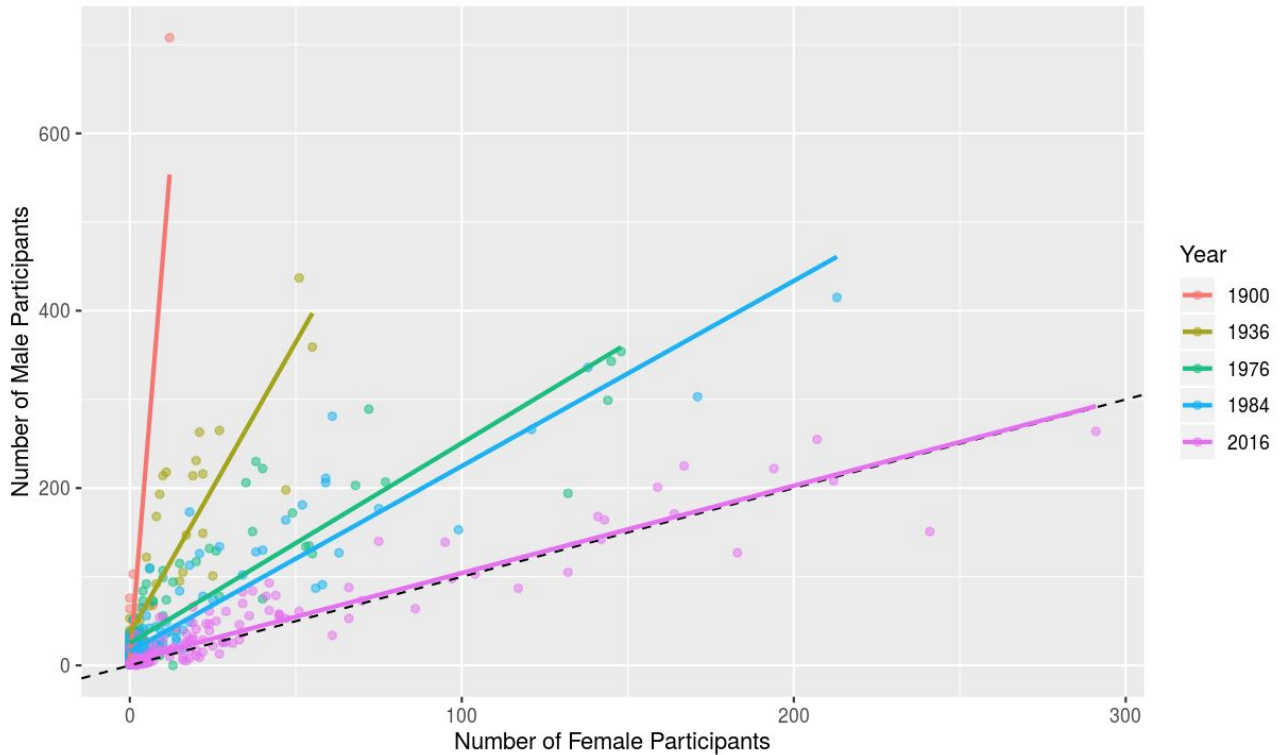
After I explored data about the games as a whole and the nations as a whole, I wanted to use data that related to the athletes individually. The next question I wanted to look into was the trend of where athletes are coming from. I wanted to see how over the past 120 years the games have drawn from nations across the world and not just a handful of locations. In order to do this, I took two of my data sets and mapped the NOC region where the athlete was from over a map. I then had the map colored a dark color where they were a high population of athletes' origin. I repeated this process for several different years over in order to see how the spread of athletes grew over time. In the figure below, I included two of the five graphics I made, one for the beginning of the Olympics and one from the 2014 Games in Sochi.



As I started to look into the athletes on a personal level, I charted their heights and weights, their ages, and the top 10 medaling athletes of Olympic History. However, despite all of the interesting data that I used and made graphics for, one of the most interesting questions for me as a female athlete is how the number of females versus males competing in the Olympics has changed over time. In the figure below, the graph displays a linear regression that was run to show the participation of male and female athletes over time and the resulting best-fit line plotted.

Female vs. Male Olympians from participating NOCs

How are the number of males vs. females different?



This graph helps show us that over time female participation in the games has been steadily increasing. If we look back at the 1900 games to now, we can tell that the growth of female involvement is increasing to hopefully one day catch up with that of the males!

This initial exploration of the data is just a start at looking into the trends of the Olympic Games and the data behind the nations and athletes that come together to compete. I hope people continue to study what makes countries successful, what makes athletes successful, and the trends that are associated with both the winter and summer seasons. I look forward to the next Olympic Games and being able to watch them with a newfound appreciation and understanding of what makes the Olympics so special.