

The Modern Olympic Games

The modern Olympic Games (OG; or Olympics; French: Jeux olympiques, JO) are the leading international sporting events featuring summer and winter sports competitions in which thousands of athletes from around the world participate in a variety of competitions. The Olympic Games are considered the world's foremost sports competition, with more than 200 teams representing sovereign states and territories participating. By default, the Games generally substitute for any world championships during the year in which they take place, though each class usually maintains its own records. The Olympic Games are held every four years. Since 1994, they have alternated between the Summer and Winter Olympics every two years during the four-year Olympiad.

Their creation was inspired by the ancient Olympic Games, held in Olympia, Greece from the 8th century BC to the 4th century AD. Baron Pierre de Coubertin founded the 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, which encompasses all entities and individuals involved in the Olympic Games. The Olympic Charter defines their structure and authority.

The evolution of the Olympic Movement during the 20th and 21st centuries has resulted in numerous changes to the Olympic Games. Some adjustments include the creation of the Winter Olympic Games for snow and ice sports, the Paralympic Games for athletes with disabilities, the Youth Olympic Games for athletes aged 14 to 18, the five Continental Games (Pan American, African, Asian, European, and Pacific), and the World Games for sports that are not contested in the Olympic Games. The IOC also endorses the Deaflympics and the Special Olympics. The IOC has needed to adapt to various economic, political, and technological advancements. The abuse of amateur rules by Eastern Bloc nations prompted the IOC to shift away from pure amateurism, as envisioned by Coubertin, to the acceptance of professional athletes participating at the Games. The growing importance of mass media has created issues of corporate sponsorship and general commercialisation of the Games. World Wars I and II led to the cancellation of the 1916, 1940, and 1944 Olympics; large-scale boycotts during the Cold War limited participation in the 1980 and 1984 Olympics; and the 2020 Olympics were postponed until 2021 as a result of COVID-19 restrictions.

The Olympic Movement consists of international sports federations (IFs), National Olympic Committees (NOCs), and organizing committees for each specific Olympic Games. As the decision-making body, the IOC is responsible for choosing the host city for each Games and organizing and funding the Games according to the Olympic Charter. The IOC also determines the Olympic program, consisting of the sports to be contested at the Games. There are several Olympic rituals and symbols, such as the Olympic flag, torch, and opening and closing ceremonies. Over 14,000 athletes competed at the 2020 Summer Olympics and 2022 Winter Olympics combined, in 40 different sports and 448 events. The first-, second-, and third-place finishers in each event receive Olympic medals: gold, silver, and bronze, respectively.

The Games have grown to the point that nearly every nation is now represented; colonies and overseas territories are often allowed to field their own teams. This growth has created numerous challenges and controversies, including boycotts, doping, bribery, and terrorism. Every two years, the Olympics and its media exposure provide athletes with the chance to attain national and international fame. The Games also provide an opportunity for the host city and country to showcase themselves to the world.

The Olympic Games have become a significant global event, fostering international cooperation and cultural exchange. At the same time, hosting the Olympic Games can bring significant economic benefits and challenges to the host city, affecting infrastructure, tourism, and local communities.

Ancient Olympics

Main article: Ancient Olympic Games

The Ancient Olympic Games (Ancient Greek: τὰ Ὀλύμπια, ta Olympia) were religious and athletic festivals held every four years at the sanctuary of Zeus in Olympia, Greece. The date of the festival was determined according to a complicated formula whereby the midpoint of the festival would occur during the second full moon after the summer solstice—usually late August or early September. This "came after the annual harvest but before the picking of the olives." Heralds were sent from Elis to announce the dates. Competition at first was among only "legitimate sons of free-born Greek parents." However, after Macedonia and then Rome conquered Greece, the ten Olympic judges loosened the earlier standard and permitted anyone who spoke Greek to participate. Tens of thousands of Greeks would make the difficult journey to attend the festival. Some sources say as many as 40,000 attended. These Games featured mainly athletic but also combat sports such as wrestling and the 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. This idea is a modern myth because the Greeks never suspended their wars. The truce did allow those religious pilgrims who were traveling to Olympia to pass through warring territories unmolested because they were protected by Zeus.

The origin of the Olympics is shrouded in mystery and legend; one of the most popular myths identifies Heracles and his father Zeus as the progenitors of the Games. According to legend, it was Heracles who first called the Games "Olympic" and established the custom of holding them every four years. The myth continues that after Heracles completed his twelve labours, he built the Olympic Stadium as an honor to Zeus. Following its completion, he walked in a straight line for 200 steps and called this distance a "stadion" (Ancient Greek: στάδιον, Latin: stadium, "stage"), which later became a unit of distance. 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. For the first thirteen Olympics, the stadion footrace was the only event contested, and victory in that sprint was so valued that the next Olympiad was named after the winner, e.g. "the third year of the eighteenth Olympiad when

Ladas of Argos won the stadion." The Ancient Games varied over time, but they came to feature running events, a pentathlon (consisting of a jumping event, discus and javelin throws, a foot race, and wrestling), boxing, wrestling, pankration, and equestrian events. Tradition has it that Coroebus, a cook from the city of Elis, was the first Olympic champion, which indicates that the competition was not limited to the aristocracy.

The Olympics were of fundamental religious importance, and the sporting events, which were held alongside ritual sacrifices honoring both Zeus (whose famous statue by Phidias stood in his temple at Olympia) and Pelops (divine hero and mythical king of Olympia), did not start until the festival's second day. (Pelops was famous for his chariot race with King Oenomaus of Pisatis.) The winners of the events were admired and immortalized in poems and statues. Although a wreath made from the sacred olive tree in the precinct of Zeus was the only official prize at the Olympic Games, winners' fame brought them economic wealth, too, in the form of subsidies from their hometowns and wealthy sponsors. The Games were held every four years, and this period, known as an 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, which included the Pythian Games, the Nemean Games, and the Isthmian Games.

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 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 decreed that all pagan cults and practices be eliminated. Another date commonly cited is 426 AD, when his successor, Theodosius II, ordered the destruction of all Greek temples.

Modern Games

See also: [List of Olympic Games host cities](#)

Forerunners

Various uses of the term "Olympic" to describe athletic events in the modern era have been documented since the 17th century. The first such event was the Cotswold Games or "Cotswold Olimpick Games", an annual meeting near Chipping Campden, England, involving various sports. It was first organized by the lawyer Robert Dover between 1612 and 1642, with several later celebrations leading up to the present day. The British Olympic Association, in its bid for the 2012 Olympic Games in London, mentioned these games as "the first stirrings of Britain's Olympic beginnings."

L'Olympiade de la République, a national Olympic festival held annually from 1796 to 1798 in Revolutionary France, also attempted to emulate the ancient Olympic Games. The competition included several disciplines from the ancient Greek Olympics. The 1796 Games also marked the introduction of the metric system into sport.

In 1834 and 1836, Olympic games were held in Ramlösa, Sweden, and in Stockholm, in 1843, organized by Gustaf Johan Schartau and others. At most, 25,000 spectators saw the games.

In 1850, an Olympian Class was started by William Penny Brookes at Much Wenlock, in Shropshire, England. In 1859, Brookes changed the name to the Wenlock Olympian Games. This annual sports festival continues to this day. The Wenlock Olympian Society was founded by Brookes on 15 November 1860.

Between 1862 and 1867, Liverpool held an annual Grand Olympic Festival. Devised by John Hulley and Charles Pierre Melly, these games were the first to be wholly amateur in nature and international in outlook, although only 'gentlemen amateurs' could compete. The program of the first modern Olympiad in Athens in 1896 was almost identical to that of the Liverpool Olympics. In 1865, Hulley, Brookes, and E.G. Ravenstein founded the National Olympian Association in Liverpool, a forerunner of the British Olympic Association. Its articles of foundation provided the framework for the International Olympic Charter. In 1866, a national Olympic Games in Great Britain was organized at London's Crystal Palace.

Revival

Greek interest in reviving the Olympic Games began with the Greek War of Independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1821. It was first proposed by poet and newspaper editor Panagiotis Soutsos in his poem "Dialogue of the Dead," published in 1833. Evangelos Zappas, a wealthy Greek-Romanian philanthropist, first wrote to King Otto of Greece, in 1856, offering to fund a permanent revival of the Olympic Games. Zappas sponsored the first Olympic Games in 1859, which was held in an Athens city square. Athletes participated from Greece and the Ottoman Empire. Zappas funded the restoration of the ancient Panathenaic Stadium so that it could host all future Olympic Games.

The stadium hosted Olympics in 1870 and 1875. Thirty thousand spectators attended the Games in 1870, though no official attendance records are available for the 1875 Games. In 1890, after attending the Olympian Games of the Wenlock Olympian Society, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, who aimed to promote international peace and friendship through sports, was inspired to found the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Coubertin built on the ideas and work of Brookes and Zappas with the aim of establishing internationally rotating Olympic Games that would occur every four years. He presented these ideas during the first Olympic Congress of the newly created International Olympic Committee. This meeting was held from 16 to 23 June 1894, at the University of Paris. On the last day of the Congress, it was decided that the first Olympic Games to come under the auspices of the IOC would take place in Athens in 1896. The IOC elected the Greek writer Demetrius Vikelas as its first president.