

# The Olympic Games in Modern Times

The site of the ancient Olympic Games lay buried until an archaeologist named Richard Chandler unearthed it in 1766. However, he was unable to pay for further excavation. In 1820 French archaeologists continued the work, uncovering the temple of Zeus. In 1875 German archaeologists started a six-year project that unearthed the entire city of Olympia. A French nobleman, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, became interested in their findings and visited the site. Coubertin loved sporting events and was fascinated by the ideals of the ancient Games. He believed that an international sports competition could promote world peace, and his efforts led to the formation of the International Olympic Committee.

The first modern Games were held in 1896 in Athens, Greece. Since then, with only three exceptions, they have been held every four years in different cities around the world. The exceptions have been 1916, 1940, and 1944. No Olympic Games took place in those years because of World Wars I and II. Every effort has been made to vary the sites every four years. The 1904 Olympic Games were held in St. Louis, Missouri. As boats and trains were the only means of transportation, the travel time for the majority of athletes and spectators attending was many, many days. The same held true for the 1932 Games held in Los Angeles, California. In the first half of the twentieth century, transportation to and from America was slow and expensive. Therefore, most Olympic Games were held in Western Europe, where they were more easily accessible to the greatest number of athletes and spectators.

In 1900, polo was introduced, bringing horses back to the Games. Gradually other sports and events were added. The winner's medal came to be cast in gold. These early Games included recognition of competitors in areas other than sports, and prizes were awarded in fine arts from 1912 through 1948. Today many host cities include a festival of the fine arts which runs in conjunction with the Olympic Games.

Although figure skating and ice hockey had been events in previous Games, the first official Olympic Winter Games to feature these events was 1924. Their scheduling brought about another change in 1992 when it was decided that the Olympic Winter Games would be held again in 1994 and every four years thereafter—1998, 2002, etc.

The summer Games would continue in years divisible by four—1996, 2000, etc. Having the summer and winter Games in different years is a bonus for a few athletes who train for both Games and for sports fans who will be able to watch the Olympic Games every other year.

Another change over the years is the faces of the competitors. In 1900, women began to compete in lawn tennis. Archery was added for them in 1904, and swimming was included in 1912. Today women medal in almost all phases of competition.

The growth of technology has also touched the Games. In 1912 the judging of race results was aided by electrical timers, in 1932 a type of electronic device was introduced, and in 1936 the Olympic Games were broadcast by radio for the first time and televised to theaters in Berlin. Televised coverage began with the 1960 Games in Rome, when images of Olympic events were broadcast into homes around the world. Thanks to television, people who had never heard of the Olympic Games became overnight fans.

# The Olympic Games in Modern Times (cont.)

Male athletes were housed in their own Olympic village for the first time in the 1932 Games in Los Angeles. Featured were separate dining rooms for each nation, entertainment facilities, and a lounge where visitors could mingle with the athletes. Female athletes were housed in nearby hotels. Spectators gathered daily outside the Village, and a true sense of friendship existed among various nationalities.

The Olympic Games have grown in numbers of both participants and spectators. The competitions now last sixteen days. More than 1,800 athletes attended the last Olympic Winter Games. They competed for gold, silver, and bronze medals in more than 60 events. More than 10,000 athletes attended the Olympic Summer Games in 1992. They competed for gold, silver, and bronze medals in more than 250 events. There are 198 nations that have Olympic committees.

There have been some rocky moments in the history of the Games. For example, the Games of 1936 in Berlin, Germany, collided with politics in the form of German Nazi leader Adolph Hitler. Despite boycott threats from American Jews justifiably angered by Hitler's outrageous policies, the Games went ahead as planned. Hitler certainly had not planned on the participation of American track superstar, Jesse Owens, the supposedly "inferior" African-American who raced to four gold medals—and international acclaim—in Berlin. In 1972, at the Olympic Games in Munich, West Germany, a terrorist attack marred the competition. Arab terrorists held as hostages and then killed 11 athletes from the Israeli Olympic Team.

At times countries have boycotted the Games because of opposing political views. A major Olympic boycott occurred in 1980 when the United States government led several nations in staying away from the Moscow Games. This was to protest the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. In 1984, the Soviets led a boycott of the Los Angeles Games in an attempt to get even. Both boycotts achieved nothing except that they hurt the athletes.

Since then, there has been a positive change in world events. The future for full attendance at upcoming Games looks hopeful.

In spite of all the changes, the ideals of the Olympic Games are the same. They are held in the hope of promoting world peace, understanding, and fair and friendly athletic competition.

