International Olympic Committee

FACTSHEET

The closing ceremony of the Olympic Games

27 January 2026

Historical introduction

The modern Olympic Games encompass more than just the drama and excitement of a sporting competition. Thanks to the vision of their founder, Pierre de Coubertin, and the creative efforts of various host organisers, the ceremonial aspects of the Olympic Games have served to set them apart from other international sports competitions. The protocol and splendour of the Olympic ceremonies, which go hand-in-hand with the celebration of the Games as everyone knows them today, make this event a unique and unforgettable festival. Although there was a Closing Ceremony at the Games of the I Olympiad Athens 1896, it bore only the slightest resemblance to today's ceremonies. In fact, some of the elements of Olympic protocol that have become a part of today's traditions were only gradually established over time through a series of adaptations to the ceremonies of early editions of the Games.

Main elements of the closing ceremony

A closing ceremony must be organised on the last day of the Games. It must be held in the Olympic stadium, normally after all the events.

Here are the protocol elements which are now an integral part of the closing ceremony:

1. Entrance of Head of State (HOS) and International Olympic Committee (IOC) President;
2. Playing of the national anthem;
3. Revealing the Olympic rings
4. Revealing the Olympic motto
5. Entry of nations' flag;
6. Parade of athletes;
7. Victory ceremonies;
8. Introduction of the IOC Athletes' Commission's newly elected members and recognition of the volunteers;
9. Moment of remembrance;
10. Playing of the Greek national anthem;
11. Lowering the Olympic flag and flag handover ceremony;
12. Next host artistic segment;
13. OCOG President's speech and IOC President's speech;
14. Extinguishing the Olympic flame.

Protocol elements of the closing ceremony

1. Entrance of Head of State (HOS) and International Olympic Committee (IOC) President

The HOS of the host country or their designee is greeted by the IOC President and the OCOG President. The IOC President, together with the HOS, enters the Presidential Box which is officially announced. It is customary that this occurs at the beginning of the closing ceremony.

2. Playing of the national anthem

After the entrance of the HOS, the national anthem of the host country is then played or sung, as the host nation's flag is raised.

3. Revealing the Olympic rings

Revealing the Olympic rings in spectacular fashion – begun as a beloved tradition – has earned its status as a protocol element in both opening and closing ceremonies.

4. Revealing the Olympic motto

The Olympic motto "Faster, Higher, Stronger – Together" expresses the aspirations of the Olympic Movement. It is the adaptation of the original motto in Latin that now translates as "Citius, Altius, Fortius – Communiter".

5. Entry of nations' flags

One of the key moments of a closing ceremony is the parade of flags of the countries participating in the Games. The Greek flag opens the march, and the host country's flag brings up the rear. Each flag is generally carried by an athlete chosen by his/her National Olympic Committee (NOC).

6. Parade of athletes

This is immediately followed by the athletes' parade. They walk *en masse* and in no particular order during this parade. For the Games of the Olympiad, the athletes enter the stadium after the artistic programme, and remain in the centre of the field. At the Summer Olympic Games, the athletes enter the stadium after the artistic programme and remain in the centre of the field. For the Olympic Winter Games, the athletes' march is near the beginning of the Ceremony, and the athletes take seats reserved for them in the audience. The idea of having all the athlete's parade in no order comes from a young Chinese man, John Ian Wing, an apprentice carpenter in Australia for the 1956 Games in Melbourne. Before these Games, the athletes had always marched behind their flag-bearer, as at the Opening Ceremony.

7. Victory ceremony

After the athletes' parade, a victory ceremony is held. The IOC, with the help of the OCOG, decides which event will have its medals presented during the closing ceremony. In Beijing in 2022, it was the victory ceremonies of the men's 50km and women's 30km in cross country skiing. For the first few editions of the Games, all the medals were presented on the last day.

8. Introduction of the IOC athletes' commission's newly elected members and recognition of the volunteers

The next protocol element is the presentation of the athletes elected by their peers to the IOC Athletes' Commission during the Games. On behalf of the athletes, these new members then present commemorative gifts to representatives of the volunteers, as a tribute and mark of gratitude for their work carried out during the Games.

9. Moment of remembrance

At Rio 2016, for the first time in modern Olympic history, a place of private mourning was provided for athletes in the Olympic Village. This included a stone from Olympia and allowed all athletes to mourn those who have passed away, in a special and dignified way. During the closing ceremony a moment of remembrance is now observed to allow everybody to remember loved ones who are longer with us and have touched our lives.

10. Playing of the Greek national anthem

The seventh protocol element is the Greek flag being raised to the left of the Olympic flag. The Greek national anthem is played simultaneously. This is a symbol of the link between the Games of Antiquity and those of the modern era.

11. Lowering the Olympic flag and flag handover ceremony

Then comes a solemn moment, the Olympic flag is lowered to the sound of the Olympic anthem. The mayors of the current host and next host join the IOC President. The mayor of the host hands the flag to the IOC President, who hands it on to the mayor of the next host. The flag of the next host country is then raised to the right of the flag of the current host country, to the sound of its anthem. At the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, the Olympic flag handover marked a historical moment in the modern Olympic Games history as both mayors were women.

This handover is a symbolic highlight. The flag will usually be displayed in the town hall of the host over the next four years.

12. Next host artistic segment

To further mark this transition from one city to another, an artistic segment of the closing ceremony is devoted to the next host. This segment is an invitation to the youth of the world to congregate in the host of the next edition of the Games.

13. OCOG president's speech and IOC president's speech

After this segment of the ceremony, which projects us into the future, the OCOG President delivers a brief speech thanking the athletes and volunteers, before

giving the floor to the IOC President, who gives the closing speech of the Olympic Games, which he ends with these words: "I declare the Games of the (number)...Olympiad (or the ... (number) Olympic Winter Games) closed and, in accordance with tradition, I call upon the youth of the world to assemble four years from now at ... (if the host has not yet been chosen, the name of the host is replaced by the words: "the place to be chosen"), to celebrate with us the Games of the ... (number) Olympiad (or the ... (number) Olympic Winter Games).".

14. Extinguishing of the Olympic flame

The last protocol element is undoubtedly the most moving: the Olympic flame is extinguished in the stadium. With this last element, this time it is certain: the Games are over.

List of mayors who have handed over and received the Olympic flag

Games of the Olympiad

Olympic Games	From	To
Los Angeles 1984*	Tom Bradley	Bo Hyun Yum (Seoul)
Seoul 1988	Kim Yong-nae	Pasqual Maragall (Barcelona)
Barcelona 1992	Pasqual Maragall	Maynard Jackson (Atlanta)
Atlanta 1996	Bill Campbell	Frank Sartor (Sydney)
Sydney 2000	Frank Sartor	Dimitris L. Avammopoulos (Athens)
Athens 2004	Dora Bakoyannis	Wang Qishan (Beijing)
Beijing 2008	Guo Jinlong	Boris Johnson (London)
London 2012	Boris Johnson	Eduardo Paes (Rio de Janeiro)
Rio 2016	Eduardo Paes	Yuriko Koike (Tokyo)
Tokyo 2020	Yuriko Koike	Anne Hidalgo (Paris)
Paris 2024	Anne Hidalgo	Karen Bass (Los Angeles)

** Before 1984, this protocol element was part of the opening ceremony*

Olympic Winter Games

Calgary 1988*	Ralph Klein	Henri Dujol (Albertville)
Albertville 1992	Henri Dujol	Audun Tron (Lillehammer)
Lillehammer 1994	Audun Tron	Tasuku Tsukada (Nagano)
Nagano 1998	Tasuku Tsukada	Deedee Corradini (Salt Lake City)
Salt Lake City 2002	Rocky Anderson	Sergio Chiamparino (Turin)
Turin 2006	Sergio Chiamparino	Sam Sullivan (Vancouver)
Vancouver 2010	Gregor Robertson	Anatoliy Pakhomov (Sochi)
Sochi 2014	Anatoliy Pakhomov	Lee Seok-rae (PyeongChang)
PyeongChang 2018	Jae-guk Sim	Jining Chen (Beijing)
Beijing 2022	Jining Chen	Giuseppe Sala, Gianpietro Ghedina (Milano Cortina)

** Before 1988, this protocol element was part of the opening ceremony.*

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