International Olympic Committee

FACTSHEET

The opening ceremony of the Games of the Olympiad

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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 an Opening 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 opening ceremony

Today, Rule 55 of the Olympic Charter outlines the protocol that must be observed at the opening ceremony of the Games, including the wording of the opening words to be delivered by the representative of host country. The other important features of the opening ceremony are:

- Entrance of Head of State (HOS) and International Olympic Committee (IOC) President;
- Playing of the national anthem;
- Revealing the Olympic rings;
- The Olympic motto;
- Parade of athletes;
- Moment of Remembrance;
- Imagine;
- Appearance of the dove(s);
- Olympic Laurel Award;
- OCOG President and IOC President's speeches;
- Opening of the Games;
- Raising the Olympic flag and playing the Olympic Anthem;
- The Oympic oath;
- Lighting of the Olympic flame;
- The artistic programme.

Protocol elements of the opening ceremony

Entrance of Head of State (HOS) and International Olympic Committee (IOC) president

The HOS of the host country is welcomed at the entrance of the venue by the IOC President. The IOC President then meets the HOS in the official stand.

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.

Revealing the Olympic rings

Revealing the Olympic rings in spectacular fashion - begun as a beloved tradition - has earned it status as a protocol element in both opening and closing ceremonies. This eagerly anticipated 'wow' moment becomes an iconic image of the show instantly transmitted globally. The element of surprise and a culturally unique concept are hallmarks of a successful Olympic rings reveal.

The Olympic motto

The Olympic motto "Faster, Higher, Stronger – Together" expresses the aspirations of the Olympic Movement. It is the update of the original motto in

Latin that now translates as “Citius, Altius, Fortius – Communiter”.

Parade of athletes

The parade of the athletes reflects both the changing world and the growth of the Olympic Movement. The number of delegations present at the Opening Ceremony of the Games of the Olympiad has increased from 22 in 1908 to 205 NOCs and the Refugee Olympic Team in Tokyo in 2020. Tradition dictates that the delegations’ parade in alphabetical order according to the language of the host country, except for Greece, which leads the parade, and the host country, which brings up the rear. Moreover, from the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, the delegation(s) of the future host(s) of the corresponding Olympic Summer Games would march towards the end of the parade, before the current host delegation. This is to strengthen the emphasis on future hosts in the stadium and among the global audience. At the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, the three delegations that ended the parade were thus the United States of America, France, and Japan, in this order. The Refugee Olympic Team, which was second at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, came straight after Greece. Each delegation is preceded by a board bearing its country’s name, and by its flag.

The usual practice is for the athletes to march behind the flag of their country, but there are sometimes exceptions. For example, the Olympic flag has been used by some nations, such as Great Britain in 1980 in Moscow, the Unified Team in 1992, and Timor-Leste in 2000. On other occasions, a special flag has been used by delegations, such as the two Koreas, which marched together in 2000, in 2004 and again in 2018. Both in Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020, a Refugee Olympic Team marched behind the Olympic flag. In Tokyo 2020, the athletes of the Russian Olympic Committee also marched behind the flag of their NOC.
The flagbearers shall be designated by the NOC. In order to draw even more attention to gender equality at the Olympic Games, all NOCs are allowed to nominate one female and one male athletes to bear the NOC flag jointly at the opening ceremony.

Moment of remembrance

A symbolic and emotional moment to remember those lost takes place at any time after the entry of the athletes but before the official speeches. This segment is dignified and appropriate for any member of the audience, whether in the venue or through broadcast.

Imagine

Since the Tokyo 2020, the internationally acclaimed song “Imagine”, co-written by John Lennon and Yoko Ono in 1971, is part of the Olympic ceremonies. The lyrics, inspired in part by Yoko Ono’s “Event Scores” in her 1964 book “Grapefruit”, encourage the audience to imagine a peaceful world, without illusion, lived in the present moment; without the divisive control mechanisms of borders, nationalism, warfare, religious constructs or ownership; where life and all its riches are shared in peace and harmony worldwide. While the original lyrics and composition are to be preserved, the OCOG and its artistic team can propose a creative treatment and integration within the opening or the closing ceremony of the Olympic Games.

Appearance of the dove(s)

As doves are the symbols of peace, the Opening Ceremony protocol calls for a symbolic release of these birds. From 1936 to 1988, the release of the pigeons used to take place before the arrival of the Olympic flame. Since 1992 the use of real birds has been replaced by a symbolic appearance of doves, which now takes place after the parade of athletes and before the lighting of the Olympic cauldron.

Olympic Laurel Award

The Olympic Laurel is a distinction created by the IOC to honor an outstanding individual for their achievements in education, culture, development and peace through sport. It recognizes the contributions of the laureate to human development, in the spirit of the ancient Olympic Games and according to the vision of Pierre de Coubertin, renovator of the Olympic Games. Starting in Rio de Janeiro, the Olympic Laurel is presented during the Opening Ceremony of every Olympic Games. Kip Keino (KEN) is the first ever recipient of the Olympic Laurel. In Tokyo in 2020, Prof. Muhammad Yunus (BAN) became the second recipient of the award. Symbolising the connection with the ancient Olympic Games, the stone used in the trophy comes from ancient Olympia. The creation of the Olympic Laurel

is part of the reforms under Olympic Agenda 2020, the former strategic roadmap for the future of the Olympic Games.

OCOG President and IOC President's speeches

First it is the President of the Organising Committee who gives a brief speech from the rostrum. Then the President of the IOC gives a speech and invite the HOS to open the Games.

Opening of the Games

The HOS proclaims the Games open without any further speech by saying: "I declare open the Games of ... (name of City) celebrating the ... Olympiad of the modern era.". Those who have performed this task are royalty and presidents, or their representatives, whether it was a vice-president, a member of the royal family, or a governor-general. ***See table A***.

Raising the Olympic flag and playing the Olympic Anthem

After the HOS opens the Games, the Olympic flag, unfurled horizontally, is brought into the stadium. The Olympic Anthem is performed as the flag is raised to the top of the pole. The Olympic flag must be flown for the entire duration of the Games.

The Olympic Anthem, with music by the Greek composer Spiros Samaras and words by Kostis Palamas, was officially adopted by the IOC in 1958 at its Tokyo Session. This anthem was created in 1896 for the first Games of the Olympiad in Athens. It was first performed at the Winter Olympic Games Squaw Valley 1960.

Officially presented at the 17th IOC Session in June 1914 in Paris, the Olympic flag was raised for the first time at the Olympic Games Antwerp 1920. The original flag was designed by Pierre de Coubertin. It included the Olympic symbol – the five rings – and the Olympic motto "Citius-Altius-Fortius". However, the motto quickly disappeared, and only the Olympic symbol remained on the flag. Contrary to what is sometimes written, it is the five rings themselves that represent the five continents, not the colours of these rings. In fact, the six colours represented on the Olympic flag – the white background, plus the blue, black, red, yellow and green of the rings – were chosen because at least one of these colours can be seen on the flag of every nation.

The Olympic oath

First pronounced by Belgian athlete Victor Boin (water polo, swimming and fencing) at the Games of the VII Olympiad Antwerp 1920, the Olympic oath of modern times is similar to that taken by the Olympic athletes of ancient times – but at the modern Olympic Games, the athletes swear on the Olympic flag, not on the entrails of a sacrificed animal. The Olympic oath of the modern Games was originally written by Pierre de Coubertin, but it has been modified over time to reflect the changing nature of the sporting competition.

The number of oath-takers has been extended from three to four – two athletes (a female and a male), one coach and one judge (also a female and a male) of the host country. Each representative recites their specific line "In the name of the athletes, ...", "In the name of all judges, ...", "In the name of all the coaches and officials, ...". Then the athletes recite on behalf of all three categories: "... we promise to take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules and in the spirit of fair play, inclusion and equality. Together we stand in solidarity and commit ourselves to sport without doping, without cheating, without any form of discrimination. We do this for the honour of our teams, in respect for the Fundamental Principles of Olympism, and to make the world a better place through sport.". ***See table C and D.***

Lighting of the Olympic flame

The Ancient Greeks considered fire to be a divine element, and they kept fires burning constantly in front of their principal temples. This was the case in the sanctuary of Olympia, where the Ancient Olympic Games took place. A flame burned permanently on the altar of the goddess Hestia, and such fires were also lit on the altars of Zeus and Hera, in front of whose temple the Olympic flame is lit today. In ancient times, the flame was lit using the rays of the sun, to ensure its purity, and a skaphia, the ancestor of the parabolic mirror used today to light the Olympic flame.

The flame is carried from Olympia by a relay all the way to its final destination: the Olympic stadium in the host of the Olympic Games about to begin. The final

torchbearer used the flame to light the Olympic cauldron, which remains lit for the duration of the Games and is extinguished only during the closing ceremony.

Like the messengers who proclaimed the sacred Olympic truce, the runners encourage the whole world to put down their weapons and turn towards the Games. The choice of Olympia as a starting point emphasises the link between the ancient and modern Games, and underlines the profound connection between the two. In Amsterdam in 1928, for the first time, a symbolic fire was lit during the Games. It is only since the Olympic Games Berlin 1936 that the Olympic flame and the torch relay have become two features of protocol that are inextricably linked.

Innovation and symbolism often play an important role in the choice of the last torch-bearers – those who will be remembered forever as having lit the cauldron in the Olympic stadium. ***See table B***.

The artistic programme

Usually, the content of the artistic programme is kept secret until the last minute. Over the years, Games organisers have managed to find creative ways to combine Olympic protocol with just the right amount of entertainment, cultural references, technological innovations and festive atmosphere.

As example of artistic direction at recent Games, the role of Director of the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games Rio 2016 has been entrusted to film director Fernando Meirelles, who was accompanied in his mission by a talented team, including film directors Andrucha Waddington and Daniela Thomas, producer Abel Gomes. Over 12,000 volunteers were auditioned for the Opening and Closing Ceremonies. Clearly, Brazilian music and culture featured prominently in the artistic segment, which was full of rhythm and colour to the great delight of the spectators in the Maracanã Stadium and TV viewers across the world.

At the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, it was an Opening Ceremony that mixed tradition, technology and a message of hope as the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 got underway. As athletes settled into their position around the field, performers from of all different backgrounds rearranged 45 boxes into a flower. They turned the arrangement inside-out to form the Tokyo 2020 Emblem. Then came the jaw-dropping moment. As 1,824 drones appeared and formed the same emblem, it slowly rose above the stadium to form the shape of the globe. The drone display could be seen shining bright in the Tokyo night sky. Fifty years ago, John Lennon and Yoko Ono co-wrote the critically acclaimed song “Imagine”. Reimagined for the Tokyo 2020 Opening Ceremony by the legendary composer Hans Zimmer, the song was performed by singing superstars John Legend and Keith Urban, alongside the Suginami Junior Chorus, Alejandro Sanz, Angélique Kidjo, Mike Knobloch and the drummers of TAIKOPROJECT.

Table A: Heads of State or their representatives who have declared the Games of the Olympiad open

Athens 1896	HM King George I
Paris 1900	No official opening
Saint Louis 1904	Mr David Francis
London 1908	HM King Edward VII
Stockholm 1912	HM King Gustav V
Antwerp 1920	HM King Albert I
Paris 1924	President Gaston Doumergue
Amsterdam 1928	HRH Prince Hendrick of Mecklenburg-Schwerin
Los Angeles 1932	Vice-President Charles Curtis
Berlin 1936	Chancellor Adolf Hitler
London 1948	HM King George VI
Helsinki 1952	President J.K. Paasikivi
Melbourne 1956	HRH the Duke of Edinburgh
Rome 1960	President Giovanni Gronchi

Tokyo 1964	HM Emperor Hirohito
Mexico City 1968	President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz
Munich 1972	President Gustav Heinemann
Montreal 1976	HM Queen Elizabeth II
Moscow 1980	President Leonid Brezhnev
Los Angeles 1984	President Ronald Reagan
Seoul 1988	President Roh Tae Woo
Barcelona 1992	HM King Juan Carlos
Atlanta 1996	President Bill Clinton
Sydney 2000	Sir William Deane
Athens 2004	President Kostis Stephanopoulos
Beijing 2008	President Jintao Hu
London 2012	HM Queen Elizabeth II
Rio 2016	Interim President of Brazil Michel Temer
Tokyo 2020	Emperor Naruhito
Paris 2024	President Emmanuel Macron

Table B: The last torchbearers in the Olympic relay

Berlin 1936	Fritz Schilgen	Athletics
London 1948	John Mark	Athletics
Helsinki 1952	Hannes Kolehmainen	Athletics
Melbourne 1956	Ron Clarke	Athletics
Rome 1960	Giancarlo Peris	Athletics
Tokyo 1964	Yoshinori Sakai	Schoolchild
Mexico City 1968	Norma Enriqueta Basilio de Sotelo	Athletics
Munich 1972	Günter Zahn	Athletics (junior)
Montreal 1976	Sandra Henderson and Stéphane Préfontaine	Gymnastics, Athletics (juniors)
Moscow 1980	Sergei Belov	Basketball
Los Angeles 1984	Rafer Johnson	Athletics
Seoul 1988	Chung Sun-Man, Kim Won-Tak, Sohn Mi-Chung	Athletics
Barcelona 1992	Antonio Rebollo	Archery
Atlanta 1996	Muhammad Ali	Boxing
Sydney 2000	Cathy Freeman	Athletics
Athens 2004	Nikolaos Kaklamanakis	Sailing
Beijing 2008	Ning Li	Gymnastics
London 2012	Callum Airlie, Jordan Duckitt, Cameron MacRitchie, Desirée Henry, Katie Kirk, Aidan Reynolds, Adelle Tracey	Sailing, Young Ambassador for London 2012, Rowing, Athletics
Rio 2016	Vanderlei Cordeiro de Lima	Athletics
Tokyo 2020	Naomi Osaka	Tennis
Paris 2024	Teddy Riner, Mélina Robert-Michon	Judo, Athletics

Table C: Competitors who have taken the oath

Antwerp 1920	Victor Boin	Fencing
Paris 1924	Georges André	Athletics
Amsterdam 1928	Henri Denis	Football
Los Angeles 1932	George Calnan	Fencing

Berlin 1936	Rudolf Ismayr	Weightlifting
London 1948	Donald Finlay	Athletics
Helsinki 1952	Heikki Savolainen	Gymnastics
Melbourne 1956	John Landy	Athletics
Rome 1960	Adolfo Consolini	Athletics
Tokyo 1964	Takashi Ono	Gymnastics
Mexico City 1968	Pablo Lugo Garrido	Athletics
Munich 1972	Heidi Schüller	Athletics
Montreal 1976	Pierre Saint-Jean	Weightlifting
Moscow 1980	Nikolay Andrianov	Gymnastics
Los Angeles 1984	Edwin Moses	Athletics
Seoul 1988	Jae Hah, Mi Na Son	Basketball, Handball
Barcelona 1992	Luis Doreste Blanco	Sailing
Atlanta 1996	Teresa Edwards	Basketball
Sydney 2000	Rechelle Hawkes	Hockey
Athens 2004	Zoi Dimoschaki	Swimming
Beijing 2008	Yining Zhang	Table Tennis
London 2012	Sarah Stevenson	Taekwondo
Rio 2016	Robert Scheidt	Sailing
Tokyo 2020	Yamagata Ryota, Ishikawa Kasumi	Athletics, Table Tennis
Paris 2024	Florent Manaudou, Marie-José Pérec	Swimming, Athletics

Table D: Officials and coaches who have taken the oath

Mexico 1968	Roberto Lavìn	Athletics
Munich 1972	Heinz Pollay	Equestrian
Montreal 1976	Maurice Forget	Swimming
Moscow 1980	Aleksandr Medved	Wrestling
Los Angeles 1984	Sharon Weber	Gymnastics
Seoul 1988	Lee Hak Rae	Judo
Barcelona 1992	Eugeni Asensio	Aquatics
Atlanta 1996	Hobie Billingsley	Aquatics
Sydney 2000	Peter Kerr	Aquatics
Athens 2004	Lazaros Voreadis	Basketball
Beijing 2008	Liping Huang	Gymnastics
London 2012	Mik Basi, Eric Farrell	Boxing, Canoe
Rio 2016	Martinho Nobre, Adriana Santos	Athletics, Basketball
Tokyo 2020	Asumi Tsuzaki, Masato Kato, Kosei Inoue, Reika Utsugi	Waterpolo, Surfing, Judo, Softball
Paris 2024	Melanie Tran, Christophe Massina	Wrestling, Judo

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