

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:

1. Entrance of Head of State (HOS) and International Olympic Committee (IOC) President;
2. Playing of the national anthem;
3. Parade of athletes;
4. Symbolic release of doves;
5. Olympic Laurel Award;
6. Official speeches;
7. Opening of the Games;
8. Raising the Olympic flag and playing the Olympic Anthem;
9. Athletes, judges and coaches' oath;

10. Lighting of the Olympic flame;
11. The artistic programme.

Protocol elements of the opening ceremony

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

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

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. 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 206 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 2018 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 Olympic flag.

4. Symbolic release of doves

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. However, following the unfortunate demise of several pigeons sitting on the edge of the Olympic cauldron at the Opening Ceremony of the Games in Seoul, the use of real birds has been replaced by a symbolic release of doves, which now takes place after the parade of athletes and before the lighting of the Olympic cauldron.

5. 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. 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.

6. Official 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.

7. 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.**

8. 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.



9. Athletes, judges and coaches' 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 from the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 has been extended from three to six – two athletes, two coaches and two judges. 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 athlete recites 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.**

10. 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 will run a lap of the stadium before the flame is used 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. 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.**

11. 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.

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 anthem “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 Sugunami 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

<i>Athens 1896</i>	HM King George I
<i>Paris 1900</i>	No official opening
<i>Saint Louis 1904</i>	Mr David Francis
<i>London 1908</i>	HM King Edward VII
<i>Stockholm 1912</i>	HM King Gustav V
<i>Antwerp 1920</i>	HM King Albert I
<i>Paris 1924</i>	President Gaston Doumergue
<i>Amsterdam 1928</i>	HRH Prince Hendrick of Mecklenburg-Schwerin
<i>Los Angeles 1932</i>	Vice-President Charles Curtis
<i>Berlin 1936</i>	Chancellor Adolf Hitler
<i>London 1948</i>	HM King George VI
<i>Helsinki 1952</i>	President J.K. Paasikivi
<i>Melbourne 1956</i>	HRH the Duke of Edinburgh
<i>Rome 1960</i>	President Giovanni Gronchi
<i>Tokyo 1964</i>	HM Emperor Hirohito
<i>Mexico City 1968</i>	President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz
<i>Munich 1972</i>	President Gustav Heinemann
<i>Montreal 1976</i>	HM Queen Elizabeth II
<i>Moscow 1980</i>	President Leonid Brezhnev
<i>Los Angeles 1984</i>	President Ronald Reagan
<i>Seoul 1988</i>	President Roh Tae Woo
<i>Barcelona 1992</i>	HM King Juan Carlos
<i>Atlanta 1996</i>	President Bill Clinton
<i>Sydney 2000</i>	Sir William Deane
<i>Athens 2004</i>	President Kostis Stephanopoulos
<i>Beijing 2008</i>	President Jintao Hu
<i>London 2012</i>	HM Queen Elizabeth II
<i>Rio 2016</i>	Interim President of Brazil Michel Temer
<i>Tokyo 2020</i>	Emperor Naruhito

Table B: The last torchbearers in the Olympic relay

<i>Berlin 1936</i>	Fritz Schilgen	Athletics
<i>London 1948</i>	John Mark	Athletics
<i>Helsinki 1952</i>	Hannes Kolehmainen	Athletics
<i>Melbourne 1956</i>	Ron Clarke	Athletics
<i>Rome 1960</i>	Giancarlo Peris	Athletics



<i>Tokyo 1964</i>	Yoshinori Sakai	Schoolchild
<i>Mexico City 1968</i>	Norma Enriqueta Basilio de Sotelo	Athletics
<i>Munich 1972</i>	Günter Zahn	Athletics (junior)
<i>Montreal 1976</i>	Sandra Henderson and Stéphane Préfontaine	Gymnastics, Athletics (juniors)
<i>Moscow 1980</i>	Sergei Belov	Basketball
<i>Los Angeles 1984</i>	Rafer Johnson	Athletics
<i>Seoul 1988</i>	Chung Sun-Man, Kim Won-Tak, Sohn Mi-Chung	Athletics
<i>Barcelona 1992</i>	Antonio Rebollo	Archery
<i>Atlanta 1996</i>	Muhammad Ali	Boxing
<i>Sydney 2000</i>	Cathy Freeman	Athletics
<i>Athens 2004</i>	Nikolaos Kaklamanakis	Sailing
<i>Beijing 2008</i>	Ning Li	Gymnastics
<i>London 2012</i>	Callum Airlie, Jordan Duckitt, Cameron MacRitchie, Desirée Henry, Katie Kirk, Aidan Reynolds, Adelle Tracey	Sailing, Young Ambassador for London 2012, Rowing, Athletics
<i>Rio 2016</i>	Vanderlei Cordeiro de Lima	Athletics
<i>Tokyo 2020</i>	Naomi Osaka	Tennis

Table C: Competitors who have taken the oath

<i>Antwerp 1920</i>	Victor Boin	Fencing
<i>Paris 1924</i>	Georges André	Athletics
<i>Amsterdam 1928</i>	Henri Denis	Football
<i>Los Angeles 1932</i>	George Calnan	Fencing
<i>Berlin 1936</i>	Rudolf Ismayr	Weightlifting
<i>London 1948</i>	Donald Finlay	Athletics
<i>Helsinki 1952</i>	Heikki Savolainen	Gymnastics
<i>Melbourne 1956</i>	John Landy	Athletics
<i>Rome 1960</i>	Adolfo Consolini	Athletics
<i>Tokyo 1964</i>	Takashi Ono	Gymnastics
<i>Mexico City 1968</i>	Pablo Lugo Garrido	Athletics
<i>Munich 1972</i>	Heidi Schüller	Athletics
<i>Montreal 1976</i>	Pierre Saint-Jean	Weightlifting
<i>Moscow 1980</i>	Nikolay Andrianov	Gymnastics
<i>Los Angeles 1984</i>	Edwin Moses	Athletics
<i>Seoul 1988</i>	Jae Hah, Mi Na Son	Basketball, Handball
<i>Barcelona 1992</i>	Luis Doreste Blanco	Sailing
<i>Atlanta 1996</i>	Teresa Edwards	Basketball
<i>Sydney 2000</i>	Rechelle Hawkes	Hockey
<i>Athens 2004</i>	Zoi Dimoschaki	Swimming
<i>Beijing 2008</i>	Yining Zhang	Table Tennis
<i>London 2012</i>	Sarah Stevenson	Taekwondo
<i>Rio 2016</i>	Robert Scheidt	Sailing
<i>Tokyo 2020</i>	Yamagata Ryota, Ishikawa Kasumi	Athletics, Table Tennis



Table D: Officials and coaches who have taken the oath

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

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