International Olympic Committee

FACTSHEET

The Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Winter Games

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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 Olympiad in 1896 in Athens, 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 briefly mentions the protocol that must be observed at the ceremonies of the Games, as well as the opening of the Games proclaimed by the host country's Head of State.

The other important features of a ceremony are:

1. Entrance of the Head of State and the International Olympic Committee President
2. Playing of the national anthem
3. Revealing the Olympic rings
4. Revealing the Olympic motto
5. Parade of athletes
6. Imagine
7. Appearance of the dove(s)
8. Official speeches by the OCOG President and IOC President
9. Opening of the Games
10. Raising the Olympic flag and playing the Olympic Anthem
11. Olympic oath by two athletes, a judge and a coach
12. Lighting of the Olympic cauldron

Protocol elements of the opening ceremony

1. Entrance of the Head of State and the International Olympic Committee President

The Head of State of the host country is received at the entrance to the stadium by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) President. The IOC President then meets the Head of State in the official stand.

2. Playing of the national anthem

After the introduction of the Head of State, the national anthem of the host country is then played or sung, as the host nation's flag is hoisted.

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. Parade of athletes

The parade of athletes reflects both the changing world and the growth of the Olympic Movement. The

number of delegations present at the opening ceremony has increased from 16 in 1924 to 91 in Beijing in 2022 for the Olympic Winter Games. Tradition dictates that delegation's 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. In addition, since the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, the delegation(s) of the future host(s) of the Olympic Games parade at the end, just before the delegation of the current host. At the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games, the two delegations that ended the parade were Italy and China. 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 at Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020, a Refugee Olympic Team marched behind the Olympic flag.

6. Imagine

Since the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, the internationally acclaimed song "Imagine", co-written by John Lennon and Yoko Ono in 1971, has been part of the Olympic ceremonies.

7. 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 doves used to take place before the arrival of the Olympic flame. However, following the unfortunate demise of several birds 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.

8. Official speeches

First it is the president of the Organising Committee who gives a brief speech from the rostrum. Then the IOC President gives a speech and invites the Head of State to proclaim the Games open.

9. Opening of the Games

The Head of State proclaims the Olympic Winter Games open without any further speech by saying: "I declare open the Games of... (name of the host) celebrating the... (number) Olympic Winter Games.". Those who have performed this task are royalty and presidents, or their representatives, such as a vice-president, a member of the royal family or a governor-general. ***See table A***.

10. Raising the Olympic flag and playing the Olympic Anthem

After the Head of State 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 played for the first time at the Olympic Winter Games in 1960.

Officially presented at the 17th IOC Session in June 1914 in Paris, the Olympic flag was raised for the first time at the Antwerp 1920 Olympic Games. 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.

11. Olympic oath

In Chamonix in 1924, the first oath of what would become the first Olympic Winter Games was delivered by French Warrant Officer Camille Mandrillon (military patrol). The Olympic oath of

modern times is similar to that taken by the Olympic athletes of ancient times, except that today the athletes swear on the Olympic flag, not on the entrails of a sacrificed animal. The Olympic oath of the modern Games was written by Pierre de Coubertin, but 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), a judge and a coach (also a female and a male). 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***.

12. Lighting of the Olympic cauldron

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.

Today, the Olympic flame and torch relay are inextricably linked. However, although the flame made its appearance at the Winter Games in Garmisch-Partenkirchen in 1936, the relay as we know it today was introduced only in 1952 in Oslo. The ceremonial aspect of the Olympic flame has not always been linked to Olympia, Greece. For instance, for the Olympic Winter Games in 1952, the flame was lit in the hearth of the home of a Norwegian skiing pioneer, Sondre Norheim, in Morgedal.
Innovation and symbolism often play an important role in the choice of the last torchbearers – those who will be remembered forever as having lit the cauldron in the Olympic stadium. ***See table B***.

For the Milano Cortina 2026 Olympic Winter Games, there will be two Olympic cauldrons located in two different places which will be lit at the same time: One will be located in Milan, at the Arco della Pace, an iconic landmark of the city. The other will be in Cortina d'Ampezzo, in Piazza Dibona, the beating heart of the mountain town.

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 "One World, One Family" theme of the Beijing 2022 Opening Ceremony was represented by the image of a single snowflake and was central to the showpiece from beginning to the end of the Ceremony. The theme was based on an ancient Chinese saying that "a truly wise person sees the whole world as a family".

International Olympic Committee

Table A: Heads of State who have declared the Olympic Winter Games open

Chamonix 1924	Gaston VIDAL
St Moritz 1928	President Edmund SCHULTHESS
Lake Placid 1932	Governor Franklin D. ROOSEVELT
Garmisch-Partenkirchen 1936	Chancellor Adolf HITLER
St Moritz 1948	President Enrico CELIO
Oslo 1952	Princess RAGNHILD
Cortina d'Ampezzo 1956	President Giovanni GRONCHI
Squaw Valley 1960	Vice-President Richard NIXON
Innsbruck 1964	President Adolf SCHÄRF
Grenoble 1968	President Charles de GAULLE
Sapporo 1972	Emperor HIRO-HITO
Innsbruck 1976	President Rudolf KIRCHSCHLÄGER
Lake Placid 1980	Vice-President Walter MONDALE
Sarajevo 1984	President Mika SPILJAK
Calgary 1988	Governor-General Jeanne SAUVÉ
Albertville 1992	President François MITTERRAND
Lillehammer 1994	King Harald V
Nagano 1998	Emperor AKIHITO
Salt Lake City 2002	President George W. BUSH
Turin 2006	President Carlo Azeglio CIAMPI
Vancouver 2010	Governor-General Michäelle JEAN
Sochi 2014	President Vladimir PUTIN
PyeongChang 2018	President MOON Jae-in
Beijing 2022	President XI Jinping

Table B: The last torchbearers in the Olympic relay

Oslo 1952	Eigil NANSEN grandson of Fridtjof NANSEN, famous explorer	
Cortina d'Ampezzo 1956	Guido CAROLI	Speed skating
Squaw Valley 1960	Kenneth Charles HENRY	Speed skating
Innsbruck 1964	Joseph RIEDER	Alpine skiing
Grenoble 1968	Alain CALMAT	Figure skating
Sapporo 1972	Hideki TAKADA	Schoolchild
Innsbruck 1976	Christl HAAS, Josef FEISTMANTL	Alpine skiing, luge
Lake Placid 1980	Charles Morgan KERR	Team doctor
Sarajevo 1984	Sanda DUBRAVČIĆ	Figure skating
Calgary 1988	Robyn PERRY	Schoolchild
Albertville 1992	Michel PLATINI and François-Cyrille GRANGE	Football and schoolchild
Lillehammer 1994	Crown Prince Hakon Magnus	
Nagano 1998	Midori ITO	Figure skating
Salt Lake City 2002	1980 US Olympic ice hockey team	
Turin 2006	Stefania BELMONDO	Cross-country skiing

Vancouver 2010	Catriona LE MAY DOAN[1], Steve NASH, Nancy GREENE RAINE, Wayne GRETZKY[2]	Speed skating, basketball, Alpine skiing, ice hockey
Sochi 2014	Vladimir TRETIAK, Irina RODNINA	Ice hockey, figure skating
PyeongChang 2018	KIM Yuna	Figure skating
Beijing 2022	YILAMUJIANG Dinigeer and ZHAO Jiawen	Cross-country skiing, ski jumping

Table C: Competitors who have taken the oath

Chamonix 1924	Camille MANDRILLON	Military patrol
St Moritz 1928	Hans EIDENBENZ	Nordic combined
Lake Placid 1932	John Ames SHEA	Speed skating
Garmisch-Partenkirchen 1936	Wilhelm BOGNER	Nordic combined and cross-country skiing
St Moritz 1948	Riccardo TORRIANI	Ice hockey
Oslo 1952	Torbjoern FALKANGER	Ski jumping
Cortina d'Ampezzo 1956	Giuliana CHENAL MINUZZO	Alpine skiing
Squaw Valley 1960	Carol HEISS	Figure skating
Innsbruck 1964	Paul ASTE	Bobsleigh
Grenoble 1968	Léo LACROIX	Alpine skiing
Sapporo 1972	Keiichi SUZUKI	Speed skating
Innsbruck 1976	Werner DELLE- KARTH	Bobsleigh
Lake Placid 1980	Eric HEIDEN	Speed skating
Sarajevo 1984	Boran KRIZAJ	Alpine skiing
Calgary 1988	Pierre HARVEY	Cross-country skiing
Albertville 1992	Surya BONALY	Figure skating
Lillehammer 1994	Vegard ULVANG	Cross-country skiing
Nagano 1998	Kenji OGIWARA	Nordic combined
Salt Lake City 2002	Jim SHEA	Skeleton
Turin 2006	Giorgio ROCCA	Alpine skiing
Vancouver 2010	Hayley WICKENHEISER	Ice hockey
Sochi 2014	Ruslan ZAKHAROV	Short-track speed skating
PyeongChang 2018	MO Tae-beom	Speed skating
Beijing 2022	WANG Qiang and LIU Jiayu,	Cross-country skiing, Snowboard

Table D: Officials and coaches who have taken the oath

Sapporo 1972	Fumio ASAKI	
Innsbruck 1976	Willy KÖSTINGER	Nordic combined
Lake Placid 1980	Terry MC DERMOTT	Speed skating
Sarajevo 1984	Dragan PEROVIC	Alpine skiing

[1] Due to a technical problem, Catriona LE MAY DOAN was not able to light the Olympic cauldron during the Opening Ceremony. She did however return to relight the cauldron during the Closing Ceremony.

[2] As the Opening Ceremony took place in an indoor stadium, Wayne GRETZKY carried the flame to light the cauldron that burned during the entire Games period located outside in Jack Poole Plaza.

Calgary 1988	Suzanna MORROW FRANCIS	Figure skating
Albertville 1992	Pierre BORNAT	Alpine skiing
Lillehammer 1994	Kari KARING	Figure skating
Nagano 1998	Junko HIRAMATSU	Figure skating
Salt Lake City 2002	Allen CHURCH	Alpine skiing
Turin 2006	Fabio BANCHETTI	Short-track speed skating
Vancouver 2010	Michel VERRAULT	Short-track speed skating
Sochi 2014	Vyacheslav VEDENIN, Jr and Anastasia POPKOVA	Cross-country skiing and Alpine skiing
PyeongChang 2018	KIM Woosik and PARK Ki-ho	Snowboard slopestyle and Nordic combined
Beijing 2022	TAO Yongchun and JI Xiao'ou	Aerials and snowboard

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