



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

FACTSHEET

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 city 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 56 of the Olympic Charter mentions the protocol that must be observed at the Opening Ceremony of the Games, as well as the opening speech by the host country's Head of State. The other important features of a ceremony are:

- The parade of the participants;
- The speech by the President of the Organising Committee of the Olympic Games;
- The speech by the IOC President;
- The playing of the Olympic anthem and the entry and raising of the Olympic flag;
- The last stage of the Olympic torch relay and the lighting of the Olympic cauldron;
- The symbolic release of pigeons;

- The taking of the Olympic oath by an athlete;
- The taking of the Olympic oath by an official;
- The national anthem of the host country;
- The artistic programme.

PROTOCOL ELEMENTS OF THE OPENING CEREMONY:

1. THE PARADE OF PARTICIPANTS

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

The number of National Olympic Committees (NOCs) present at the Opening Ceremony has increased from 22 in 1908 to 204 in Beijing in 2008. 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.

In Beijing, a bearer with the Greek flag entered the stadium first, in front of all the other delegations, while the Chinese team concluded the parade. 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 Sydney in 2000, and again in Athens.



2. THE HEAD OF STATE DECLARES THE GAMES OPEN

According to the Olympic Charter protocol that has existed for many years, the duty of declaring the Games officially open falls to the Head of State of the host country. Among the personalities that have performed this task are royalty and presidents, and, in accordance with acceptable political protocol within the country and with IOC approval, their representatives, whether it be a vice-president, a member of the royal family, or a governor-general.

Since the Games of the I Olympiad in Athens in 1896, a total of 19 Heads of State have opened the Games of the Olympiad. **See table A.**

3. THE OLYMPIC ANTHEM

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, but for the Olympic Winter Games it was played for the first time in Squaw Valley in 1960.

4. THE OLYMPIC FLAG

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 in Antwerp in 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, and 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 of the fact that at least one of these colours can be seen in the flag of every nation.

5. THE OLYMPIC FLAME AND TORCH RELAY

The Ancient Greeks considered fire to be a divine element, and they maintained perpetual fires 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 for lighting the Olympic flame. Today, the flame is lit in front of the ruins of the temple of Hera in Olympia, using the sun's rays and a parabolic mirror.

The flame is carried by a relay all the way to its final destination: the Olympic stadium in the host city of the Olympic Games about to begin. When the flame finally arrives at its destination, 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 at the Closing Ceremony of the Games.

Like the messengers who proclaimed the sacred Olympic truce, the runners who carry the Olympic flame encourage the whole world to put down their weapons and turn towards the Games. The choice of Olympia as a departure point emphasises the link between the ancient and modern Games, and underlines the profound connection between the two.

The ceremonial aspect of the Olympic flame has not always been linked to Olympia in Greece. It is only since the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936 that the Olympic flame and the torch relay have become two features of protocol which are inextricably linked.

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.**

The arrival of the flame at the Opening Ceremony in Beijing was more than merely a part of the protocol that symbolises the start of



another celebration of the Games. It also marked the end of a unique journey. More than 21,800 torchbearers had carried the flame over 137,000 kilometres during 129 days.

6. THE SYMBOLIC RELEASE OF PIGEONS

As doves are the symbol of peace, it is no surprise that 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, this part of the protocol was moved, but not eliminated. Today, the symbolic release of the pigeons follows the lighting of the Olympic cauldron.

7. THE TAKING OF THE OLYMPIC OATH BY A COMPETITOR

First pronounced by Belgian athlete Victor Boin (water polo, swimming, and fencing) at the 1920 Games of the Olympiad in Antwerp, the Olympic oath of modern times was 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 modern Olympic oath was originally written by Pierre de Coubertin, and has been modified over time to reflect the changing nature of the sporting competition. The current version of the oath, which was sworn by the Chinese table tennis player Zhang Yining in Beijing, stated: *"In the name of all competitors I promise that we shall take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules which govern them, committing ourselves to a sport without doping and without drugs, in the true spirit of sportsmanship, for the glory of sport and the honour of our teams."* **See table C.**

8. THE TAKING OF THE OLYMPIC OATH BY AN OFFICIAL

Since 1972, a judge or official from the host country also takes an oath. In Beijing in 2008, Liping Huang, a Chinese gymnastics official, pronounced the following oath: *"In the name of all the judges and officials, I promise that we shall officiate in these Olympic Games with*

Opening ceremony of the Games of the Olympiad / July 2009

complete impartiality, respecting and abiding by the rules which govern them, in the true spirit of sportsmanship." **See table D.**

9. THE ARTISTIC PROGRAMME

Once the national anthem of the host country has been played, the show begins. Usually, the content 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 Sydney 2000 presentation covered the history, nature and culture of the whole of Australia. In Turin in 2006, the organisers offered spectators and television viewers a ceremony in which the athletes were at the heart of things, with an unforgettable show illustrating the values of brotherhood and dialogue between peoples and cultures, to show that "passion lives here". For its part, the Opening Ceremony of the 2004 Games in Athens, produced by Dimitris Papaioannou, offered a memorable mix of Olympic protocol and Greek culture. The various scenes depicted 3,000 years of this historical legacy, highlighting the links between the Ancient Games and this first Olympiad of the 21st century.

The Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympic Games was spectacular, unforgettable and stirring. It celebrated the imagination, originality and dynamism of the Beijing Olympic Games. Under the leadership of Zhang Yimou, 22,000 actors gave life to the motto "One World, One Dream". They retraced the history of China in a grandiose show bringing to life Chinese inventions and culture.



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

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Athens 1896 | HM King George I |
| Paris 1900 | No official opening |
| Saint Louis 1904 | 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 |

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 | 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 |



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 | Hah Jae and Son Mi Na | Sailing |
| Barcelona 1992 | Luis Doreste Blanco | Sailing |
| Atlanta 1996 | Teresa Edwards | Basketball |
| Sydney 2000 | Rechelle Hawkes | Hockey |
| Athens 2004 | Zoi Dimoschaki | Sailing |
| Beijing 2008 | Yining Zhang | Table Tennis |

Table D: Officials who have taken the oath

| | | |
|-------------------------|------------------|------------|
| Munich 1972 | Heinz Pollay | Equestrian |
| Montreal 1976 | Maurice Forget | Athletics |
| 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 Billingsly | Aquatics |
| Sydney 2000 | Peter Kerr | Aquatics |
| Athens 2004 | Lazaros Voreadis | Basketball |
| Beijing 2008 | Liping Huang | Gymnastics |

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