

THE OLYMPIC GAMES



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Every four years, a unique international sporting event called the Olympics is held. This brings together athletes from over 100 countries around the world for two weeks of athletic events. The Olympic Games were established to further world peace and international friendship by replacing military competition with athletic competition.

There is both a Summer Olympics and a Winter Olympics. Previous summer Olympics have been held in Barcelona, Seoul, Atlanta and Sydney. This year, the Summer Olympics will be held in the city of Athens, Greece from August 13 - 29, 2004.

THE ANCIENT GREEK GAMES

The Olympic Games began about 3500 years ago in ancient Greece. The first recorded Olympic Games took place at the town of Olympia in 776 BC. The first Olympics were only running races, but gradually other events were added. All participants had to compete naked, with no clothes. The ancient Olympics were finally stopped by a Roman Emperor who was a Christian in the year 393 AD.

THE MODERN OLYMPICS

After 393 AD, no games were held for over 1,500 years. The modern Olympics were revived in the 19th century by an idealistic Frenchman named Pierre de Coubertin. He had read about the ancient Greek Olympics and wanted to restart the games. He believed the Olympic Games could contribute to world peace and international friendship. Thanks to him, the first modern Olympics were held in Athens in 1896, and the Games have been held regularly since then every four years.

OLYMPIC DATA

- **Olympic Symbol** The five interlocking rings represent the five continents (Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and America) and stand for international friendship.
- **Olympic Motto** The motto of the Olympic Games is *Citius, Altius, Fortius* meaning *swifter, higher, stronger* in Latin.
- **Olympic Creed** "The most important thing is not to win but to take part, just as the

most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle."

OLYMPIC ISSUES

- **War** - In ancient Greece, a one-month truce was called and all fighting stopped during the Games. The modern Olympics were cancelled three times (1916, 1940, 1944) because of World War I and World War II.
- **Money** - The Olympics are based on the ideals of amateurism, yet medal winners earn big money, nations spend large amounts on their teams, and the Games have become highly commercialized.
- **Nationalism** - Countries compete to see which one will get the most medals. Many people only cheer for their own nations.
- **Drugs** - Athletes under intense pressure to win Olympic medals for their countries use steroids and other illegal drugs.
- **Racism** - Adolf Hitler expected the 1936 Berlin Olympics to promote Nazism and prove the white race was superior. He was shocked when Jesse Owens and nine other Black athletes won 8 gold medals. South Africa was banned from the Olympics for years because of its racist apartheid system.
- **Sexism** - Women weren't allowed to compete at all in the ancient Olympics. They couldn't take part in track and field events until the year 1928.
- **Health** - A *Special Olympics* is held for people with mental handicaps and a *Paralympics* for those with physical disabilities.

QUESTIONS

1. How often are the Olympic Games held?
2. How long do they last?
3. How many countries usually participate?
4. Where were some of the previous Summer Olympic Games held?
5. When and where will the 2004 Olympic Games be held?
6. When were the first recorded Olympics?
7. Did athletes wear clothes in the ancient Greek Olympic Games?
8. Who stopped the first Olympics? When?
9. Who revived the Olympics? When?
10. What does the Olympic symbol stand for?
11. What's the Olympic motto?
12. Who are the *Special Olympics* for?
13. Who are the *Paralympics* for?
14. Explain the issue of... war / money / nationalism / drugs / racism / sexism.