



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

FACTSHEET

OPENING CEREMONY OF THE SUMMER OLYMPIC GAMES

UPDATE – FEBRUARY 2008

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 58 of the Olympic Charter briefly 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 202 in Athens in 2004. According to tradition, 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 Athens, a bearer with the Greek flag entered the stadium first, in front of all the other delegations, while the Greek 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 18 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

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. There were however torch races (*lapadedromia*) in Ancient Greece. The ceremonial aspect of the Olympic flame has not always been linked to Olympia, Greece. In fact, for the Olympic Winter Games in 1952 and 1960, the flame was lit in the hearth of the home of a Norwegian skiing pioneer, Sondre Norheim, in Morgedal. And in 1956, it was lit in the Capitol in Rome. 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 Athens 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 11,000 torchbearers had carried the flame for the first time to all the summer host cities as well as to all five continents.

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. In fact, from the time that this element was officially introduced into Opening Ceremony protocol at the Games of the VII Olympiad in Antwerp in 1920, it has always been stipulated in subsequent editions of the Olympic Charter that it would be a symbolic release of pigeons. 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 Greek swimmer Zoï Dimoschaki in Athens, was introduced in 1999. **See table C.**

"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."

(Olympic Charter, 2003, p. 104)

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 Athens in 2004, Lazaros Voreadis, a basketball 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 complete impartiality, respecting and abiding by the rules which govern them, in the true spirit of sportsmanship."* *(Olympic Charter, 2003, p. 104)*

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.

SOURCE

www.olympic.org/uk/games

Miquel de Moragas i Spà, John MacAloon and Montserrat Llinés (eds), *Olympic Ceremonies: Historical continuity and cultural exchange*, Lausanne: Comité International Olympique, 1996.



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

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



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 et Son Mi Na	Sailing
Barcelona 1992	Luis Doreste Blanco	Sailing
Atlanta 1996	Teresa Edwards	Basketball
Sydney 2000	Rechelle Hawkes	Hockey
Athens 2004	Zoï Dimoschaki	Sailing

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

IMPRINT

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GAMES OF THE OLYMPIAD**

February 2008

A publication of the

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