



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 unique and unforgettable. 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](#) outlines the protocol that must be observed at the Opening Ceremony of the Games, including the wording of the opening speech to be delivered by the host country's head of state.

Other important features of the Opening Ceremony are:

1. Entry by the head of state
2. Playing the national anthem
3. The parade of the athletes;
4. The symbolic release of pigeons;
5. The opening of the Games by the head of state
6. Raising the Olympic flag and playing the Olympic anthem;
7. The taking of the Olympic oath by an athlete;
8. The taking of the Olympic oath by an official;
9. The taking of the Olympic oath by a coach
10. The Olympic flame and Torch Relay

11. The artistic programme.

PROTOCOL ELEMENTS OF THE OPENING CEREMONY:

1. HEAD OF STATE ENTRY

The head of state of the host country is received at the entrance of the stadium by the IOC President. The IOC President then meets the head of state in the official stand. It is customary for this to occur at the beginning of the Opening Ceremony.

2. PLAYING 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. PARADE OF ATHLETES 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 London in 2012. 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 London, a bearer with the Greek flag entered the stadium first, in front of all the other delegations, while the British team concluded the parade. Delegations should be treated equally! No single country must receive greater attention than any other. 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, and again in 2004 or for the Independent Olympic Athletes in London in 2012.

4. THE SYMBOLIC RELEASE OF PIGEONS

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. THE HEAD OF STATE DECLARES THE GAMES OPEN

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 invites the Head of State to proclaim the Games open.

According to the Olympic Charter protocol, the duty of declaring the Games officially open falls to the head of state of the host country. 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.

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*.

6. 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.

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, 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.

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 Sarah Stevenson (taekwondo) in London, states: *"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 has also taken an oath. In London in 2012, Mik Basi, a boxing 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."* **See table D.**

9. THE TAKING OF THE OLYMPIC OATH BY A COACH

Introduced for the first time at the Youth Olympic Games in 2010 in Singapore, the Olympic Oath taken by a coach was added to the protocol for the Olympic Games in 2012. It was canoeing Coach Eric Farrell who was given this honor in London.

Immediately after the officials' oath, a coach from the host country mount the rostrum and, in the same manner, recite the following oath: *"In the name of all the coaches and other members of the athletes' entourage, I promise that we shall commit ourselves to ensuring that the spirit of sportsmanship and fair play is fully adhered to*

and upheld in accordance with the fundamental principles of Olympism."

10. THE OLYMPIC FLAME AND TORCH RELAY

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 city 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 at the Closing Ceremony of the Games.

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 in Berlin in 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 torchbearers – 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 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.

The stunning Opening Ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic Games, directed by Danny Boyle and produced by Stephen Daldry, Mark Fisher, Hamish Hamilton and Catherine Ugwu, was titled “Isles of Wonder”. It reflected key themes based on sport, inspiration, youth and urban transformation. It was a ceremony “for everyone” and celebrated UK’s contributions to the world through innovation and revolution, as well as the creativity and exuberance of British people.

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 Diaz 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

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	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 Desirée Henry Katie Kirk Cameron MacRitchie Aidan Reynolds Adelle Tracey.	Sailing Young Ambassador for London 2012 Athletics Athletics Rowing Athletics Athletics

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 and 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

Table D: Officials who have taken the oath

<i>Munich 1972</i>	Heinz Pollay	Equestrian
<i>Montreal 1976</i>	Maurice Forget	Athletics
<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	Boxing

Table E: Coaches who have taken the oath

<i>Londres 2012</i>	Eric Farrell	Canoe
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