

# THE OLYMPIC GAMES

## Memorable moments or a political tool?

**THIS AUGUST THE CITY OF BEIJING, CHINA, WILL HOST THE 29TH SUMMER OLYMPICS. THROUGH THE YEARS THE OLYMPICS HAVE NOT ALWAYS MET THE GOAL OF BEING PEACEFUL AND APOLITICAL, BUT THEY HAVE BECOME A PART OF OUR WORLD CULTURE, AND HAVE GIVEN US MANY THRILLING AND UNFORGETTABLE MOMENTS.**

### ANCIENT ORIGINS

It is difficult to separate myth from reality, but it is thought the first Olympics were held in 776 B.C. From that point on, the games were held every four years, and became such a regular event that people of the time used them to **mark epochs in history**. The original games finally came to an end in A.D. 393, when they were **banned** by **Emperor Theodosius I**. Theodosius was a Christian and disliked the games' **pagan origins**.

### MODERN TIMES

Ironically, **it took a war to bring about the beginnings of the modern Olympics**. A Frenchman, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, tried to find the reason his nation was defeated in the Franco-Prussian War (1870 - 71). His **conclusion** was that the Prussian soldiers were in much better physical condition than the French. Coubertin thought a regular meeting of nations to compete in athletics would help **prevent** war, and, if another war did come, the games would also make his countrymen more fit to fight. Other Europeans liked the idea, and in 1896 the first modern Olympics were held in Athens, Greece. The games were a huge success, and with 250 athletes representing 14 countries, it was **up to that**

**time** the biggest sporting event ever held.

In 1913, the now-famous emblem of five colored rings against a white background was adopted. The logo was designed by Baron de Coubertin, with the rings representing the five continents of the competing nations. The 1928 games in Amsterdam marked the first time women were allowed to compete.

Nowadays, the games are usually watched on television by nearly four billion people. The **broadcasting** of the Olympics has given the world many shared memories of great performances. But it has also given much more power to nations which wish to use the games as a tool for politics and propaganda.

### POLITICS

It has always been difficult to **keep politics out of** the Olympics. Since the very beginning, many nations and individuals have tried to use the Olympics to **highlight** their political agenda.

One of these was Hitler's use of the 1936 Olympics in Berlin to **promote the Third Reich**. Unfortunately for Hitler and his ideas of **racial superiority**, many black athletes won medals, including the great Jesse Owens, who won four gold medals for the United States.

Tragedy struck the Olympics during the Munich games in 1972. Eleven members of the Israeli Olympic team **were kidnapped** and killed by Palestinian terrorists.

The Cold War also **interfered with** the Olympics. In 1980, the US **boycotted** the games held in Moscow to protest against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and in response, the USSR boycotted the 1984 games in Los Angeles.

### MAGIC MOMENTS

Over the years there have been many performances that have thrilled the world. The 1924 games inspired the 1981 UK Oscar-winning film *Chariots of Fire*, about two British athletes.

The 1952 Olympics in Melbourne **brought** Emil Zátopek **to the world stage**. This Czech long distance runner won gold medals in the 10,000 and 5,000 metre races, and the marathon. **Incredibly**, it was the first time Zátopek had ever run a marathon.

Other great performances include American swimmer

Mark Spitz winning a record seven medals, in 1972, and in 1976 Romanian gymnast Nadia Comaneci becoming the first gymnast **to receive a perfect ten score from the judges**.

In the 1990s, professional athletes were allowed to compete for the first time, resulting in the legendary *Dream Team*, the American basketball team **that featured** players such as Michael Jordan and Larry Bird.

### THE 2008 GAMES

Beijing was a controversial choice for the 2008 games, as China **has a very poor record on** human rights and **conservation**. No states have said they would boycott the games, but there have been protests by various human-rights organizations. Another problem is the air pollution in Beijing, where levels are not considered safe.

So, should China host the Olympics at all? And will the 2008 games be remembered for amazing athletics triumphs or for risk and danger? **Patrick Phillips (USA)**

### → Vocabulary

**apolitical** [eɪpə'li:tɪk(ə)] - apolitický, nepolitický

**thrilling and memorable** [θrɪlɪŋ 'mɛm(ə)rəb(ə)] - vzrušujících a nezapomenutelných

**to mark epochs in history** [mɑ:k 'i:pɒks] - k označování historických období

**to ban** [bæn] - zakázat

**emperor** ['ɛmp(ə)rə] - císař

**pagan origins** ['peɪɡ(ə)n 'ɔrɪdʒɪnz] - pohanský původ

**it took a war to bring about the beginnings of... Olympics** - počátky... Olympiády vděčí za svůj vznik válce

**conclusion** [kən'klu:ʒ(ə)n] - závěr (úspěch)

**to prevent (sth.)** [prɪ'vent] - předcházet (něčemu)

**up to that time** - do té doby

**broadcasting** ['brɔ:dkɑ:stɪŋ] - vysílání

**to keep politics out of** - udržet politiku mimo

**to highlight (sth.)** ['haɪlaɪt] - poukázat na (něco)

**to promote** [prə'məʊt] - prosazovat

**Third Reich** [raɪk] - Třetí říše

**racial superiority** ['reɪʃ(ə)li su:prɪəri'brɪti] - rasová nadřazenost

**to kidnap** ['kɪdnæp] - unést

**to interfere with** [ɪntə'fɪə] - zasáhnout do

**to boycott** ['boɪkɒt] - bojkotovat

**brought... to the world stage** [steɪdʒ] - uvedla... na světovou scénu

**incredibly** [ɪn'krɛdɪblɪ] - ačkolí je to k neuvěření

**to receive a perfect ten score from the judges** [skɔ: dʒʌdʒɪz] - která dostala od rozhodčích nejvyšší, desetibodové ohodnocení

**that featured** ['fi:tʃəd] - ve kterém hráli

**has a very poor record on...**

**conservation** [kɒnsə'veɪʃ(ə)n] - má velmi špatnou pověst, co se týče... ochrany životního prostředí

### SUMMER OLYMPIC DISCIPLINES

**weightlifting** ['weɪtlɪftɪŋ] - vzpírání

**the starting gun goes off** - kdy vystřelí startérská pistole

**burst** [bɜ:st] - nával, výbuch

**relay race** ['ri:lɪeɪ reɪs] - štafeta

**baton** ['bæt(ə)n] - štafetový kolík

**teammate** ['ti:mmeɪt] - člen týmu

**handoff** ['hændɒf] - předání

**tricky** ['trɪki] - obtížný

**shot put** - vrh koulí

**hurdle** ['hɜ:d(ə)l] - překážka

**discus** ['dɪskʌs] - hod diskem

**pole vault** [pəʊl vɔ:lt] - skok o tyči

**javelin** ['dʒæv(ə)lɪn] - hod oštěpem

**bar** [bɑ:] - tyč

**a long pole to vault over a bar** - dlouhou tyč, aby se přehoupl přes tyč

**hammer throw** ['hæmə] - hod kladivem

# SUMMER OLYMPIC

Patrick Phillips  
(USA)

# DISCIPLINES

THERE ARE 28 SPORTS REPRESENTED IN THE 2008 OLYMPICS, EACH INCLUDING VARIOUS DISCIPLINES. IN TOTAL, THERE WILL BE OVER 300 EVENTS (COMPETITIONS IN WHICH MEDALS ARE AWARDED).

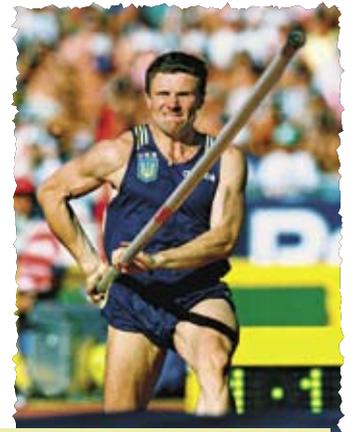
PARTICIPANTS WILL COMPETE IN SWIMMING, DIVING, CYCLING, BOXING, CANOEING, BASEBALL, BASKETBALL, FOOTBALL, GYMNASTICS, JUDO, TENNIS, SHOOTING, WEIGHTLIFTING AND MANY MORE SPORTS. ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR SUMMER OLYMPICS SPORTS IS ATHLETICS – AND HERE ARE A FEW OF THE MOST WATCHED ATHLETIC DISCIPLINES:

**100 meters** is the shortest sprint in outdoor athletics. From the moment **the starting gun goes off**, participants give everything they have in a **burst** of speed. Ten seconds later it is over, and the sprinters wait another four years to do it again.

In the **high jump** participants try to make the highest jump over a **bar**. Both the men's and women's high jump are very popular, and this is one of the most exciting disciplines in athletics.



In **relay races**, each member of the four-person team must run either 100 or 400 meters. When the runner finishes, he must hand a **baton** to his **teammate** who then continues. The **handoff** of the baton is very **tricky**, and must be timed perfectly.



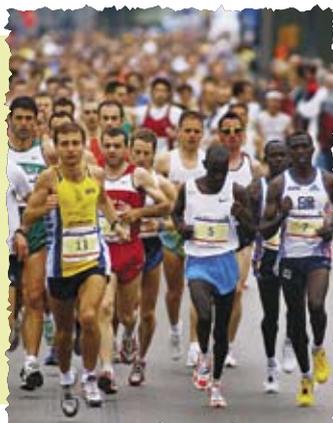
The **pole vault** can be thought of as extreme high jumping. Athletes use a **long pole to vault over a bar**, and the one who jumps the highest without knocking down the bar wins.

The **decathlon** is the most prestigious of all athletic disciplines. It consists of ten events (100m, long jump, **shot put**, high jump, 400m, 110m **hurdles**, **discus**, **pole vault**, **javelin**, and 1500m) and takes place over two days. The greatest decathlete of all time is the Czech Republic's Roman Šebrle.



The **110 meter hurdles** is another sprint, but the big difference is participants must jump over hurdles on their way to the finish line. Women run 100 meter hurdles.

The **marathon** is the longest race in athletics. Participants must run a road race 42.195 km long. They start and finish in the Olympic stadium. This is traditionally the final athletics event of the Olympics, and usually takes place on the last day of the competition.



**Discus, javelin, shot put, hammer throw:** The goal of the four throwing disciplines is similar – throw something farther than anyone else. The discus, similar to a frisbee (flying disc), and the javelin can both be thrown great distances. The shot (a metal ball) and the hammer are very heavy, and so the distances they can be thrown are much shorter.

