
MACMILLAN READERS
PRE-INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

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The Story of the Olympics: An Unofficial History

 MACMILLAN

The Olympics Today

Thousands of athletes¹ and spectators² are waiting, excited. They are in a new stadium³ in one of the most important cities in the world. Then an athlete stands up. He promises that the thousands of athletes in the stadium will play their sport fairly⁴. He promises that they will try their hardest for their sport and for their country. There is music, singing, dancing and fireworks⁵. The Olympic Games have begun!

The Summer Olympics are one of the biggest sports events⁶ in the world and they are held only once every four years. More than ten thousand athletes from around the world come to the Summer Olympic Games and compete⁷ in more than three hundred events, in twenty-six different sports. There are running and swimming races⁸, athletics and gymnastics events, and many other games are played, including basketball and football. In every event, the winners are given medals⁹: gold for first place, silver for second and bronze for third. Many of the athletes who compete become famous in their own country and around the world.

This book is mainly about the Summer Olympic Games. The Summer Olympics are held in a specially chosen international city. The Winter Olympic Games are smaller. They are held in a different place, two years after the Summer Olympics. The most important Winter events are in sports like skiing, ice-skating and bobsledding. In the same places and in the same years, there are also Summer and Winter Paralympics – Olympic Games for people with a disability¹⁰. In 2010 the first ever Youth Olympics were also held.

A team¹¹ of athletes from nearly every country in the world comes to the Olympics. Millions of people watch the Games

on television. Because the Games are so big and so important, many countries want to host them – to hold them in their country.

The Olympic Games are organized¹² by the International Olympic Committee¹³, or IOC. The IOC chooses the best place for the Summer and Winter Olympics every four years. Committees for the different sports and for the host country help to organize the Games. There is a lot of work to do when a country hosts the Olympics. Often new stadiums and swimming pools are needed and the host country also has to build an Olympic village where the athletes sleep, eat and relax during the Games. The host country often has to improve roads and public transport – that means more buses and trains. It is important that athletes and spectators can travel easily to and from the Games. Hosting the Olympics is very expensive, but the Games can bring a lot of money to the host country. When a country hosts the Olympics, many tourists travel there. People all around the world see and learn about the country.

The very first Olympic Games were held in Greece nearly three thousand years ago. The Olympics have grown and changed a lot since then. Because they are so old and so big, there are many Olympic traditions. The Olympics have their own anthem, or song, and their own special flag. The flag has five coloured rings. Every Olympic Games also has its own mascot – an animal or object that is specially chosen for that year's Games. The mascot is chosen by the host country and is seen in every piece of information about the Olympics that year. Often the mascot is something that makes people think of the host country. For the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney, the mascots were three Australian animals. The mascot for the 1980 Olympics in Moscow, Russia, was a bear called Misha.

The first important event of the Olympic Games is when the Olympic torch¹⁴ is lit. The torch is lit in Olympia, the place in



The Olympic flag being carried into the stadium at the 1988 Seoul Games

Greece where the Olympics first began. It is lit several months before the Games start and is then carried by athletes, handed from one to another, across the world. In the months before the 2008 Olympics, the torch travelled 137,000 kilometres! It arrives at the Games during the opening ceremony¹⁵.

The opening ceremony is an important part of the Summer Olympic Games. First there is a parade¹⁶ of all the athletes who are competing in the Games. As the Olympic Games started in Greece, the Greek team is always at the front of the parade. The host team is always at the back. Next there are speeches¹⁷, made by the president of the IOC and the organizer of the games, and then the Olympic anthem is played. After that the Olympic flag is carried into the stadium and put up so everyone can see it. After the flag, the Olympic torch is brought into the stadium. A famous athlete then uses the torch to light the Olympic cauldron¹⁸, which burns until the end of the Games. Some white pigeons¹⁹ are then set free and they fly out of the stadium. This is to show that the Olympic Games are always held in peace²⁰. Then, after an athlete and a judge²¹ have promised to compete and judge fairly, the host country's national anthem is played. At the end of the opening ceremony there is a wonderful show with music and dancing.

For the next sixteen days, the best sportspeople in the world compete with each other in many different events. Often the weather is much hotter, colder, drier or wetter than in the athletes' own countries. Many of them are thousands of kilometres away from their families and friends. There are always surprises, disappointments²² and great moments. New records are set when people run or swim faster than ever before, or jump or throw higher or further. Hundreds of medals are awarded and many people become famous for the first time.

At the closing ceremony, the athletes enter the stadium once more, this time not in their national teams but all together. National anthems are played and the host country returns the Olympic flag to the IOC. The flag is then given to the country that will host the next Olympics. The fire in the cauldron is put out and the Games have finished. People must wait another four years for the next Summer Olympic Games.