

FACTSHEET

The opening ceremony of the Olympic Winter Games

08 February 2022

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 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 55 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:

1. Entrance of Head of State (HOS) and International Olympic Committee (IOC) President;
2. Playing of the national anthem;
3. Parade of athletes;
4. Symbolic release of doves;
5. Official speeches;
6. Opening of the Games;
7. Raising the Olympic flag and playing the Olympic Anthem;
8. Athletes, judges, and coaches' oath;
9. Lightening of the Olympic flame;
10. Artistic programme.

Protocol elements of the opening ceremony

1. Entrance of Head of State (HOS) and International Olympic Committee (IOC) President

The HOS of the host country is received at the entrance to the stadium by the IOC President. The IOC President then meets the HOS in the official stand.

2. Playing of the national anthem

After the introduction of the HOS, 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 athletes reflects both the changing world and the growth of the Olympic Movement. The number of delegations present at the opening ceremony has increased from 16 in 1924 to 92 in PyeongChang in 2018 for the Olympic Winter Games. 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. Moreover, from the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, the delegation(s) of the future host(s) of the corresponding Olympic Summer Games would march towards the end of the parade, before the current host delegation. This is to strengthen the emphasis on future hosts in the stadium and among the global audience. At the Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022, the two delegations that will end the parade are thus Italy and China. 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, in 2004 and again in 2018. Both in Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020, a Refugee Olympic Team marched behind the Olympic flag. In Tokyo 2020, the athletes of the Russian Olympic Committee also marched behind the Olympic flag.

4. Symbolic release of doves

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. Official speeches

First it is the president of the Organising Committee who gives a brief speech from the rostrum. Then the IOC President gives a speech and invites the HOS to proclaim the Games open.

6. Opening of the Games

The HOS proclaims the Olympic Winter Games open without any further speech by saying: "I declare open the Games of ... (name of the host) celebrating the ... (number) Olympic Winter Games.". 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. **See table A.**

7. Raising the Olympic flag and playing the Olympic Anthem

After the HOS 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. It was played for the first time at the Olympic Winter Games Squaw Valley 1960.

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 Antwerp 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.

8. Athletes, judges and coaches' oath

In Chamonix in 1924, the first oath of what would become the first Olympic Winter Games was pronounced by French Warrant Officer Camille Mandrillon (military patrol). The Olympic oath of modern times is similar to that pronounced by the Olympic athletes of ancient times, except that today the athletes swear on the Olympic flag, not on the entrails of a sacrificed animal. The Olympic oath of the modern Games was written by Pierre de Coubertin, but has been modified over time to reflect the changing nature of the sporting competition.

The number of oath-takers from the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 has been extended from three to six – two athletes, two coaches and two judges. Each representative recites their specific line "In the name of the athletes, ...", "In the name of all judges, ...", "In the name of all the coaches and officials, ...". Then the athlete recites on behalf of all three categories: "... we promise to take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules and in the spirit of fair play. We all commit ourselves to sport without doping and cheating. We do this, for the glory of sport, for the honour of our teams and in respect for the fundamental principles of Olympism.". **See table C and D.**



9. Lightening of the Olympic flame

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 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 during the closing ceremony.

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.

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. The ceremonial aspect of the Olympic flame has not always been linked to Olympia, Greece. For instance,

for the Olympic Winter Games in 1952, the flame was lit in the hearth of the home of a Norwegian skiing pioneer, Sondre Norheim, in Morgedal.

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.**

10. 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 Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi in 2014 adopted a historical theme, portraying Russian achievements such as industrialisation, space exploration and the foundation of St. Petersburg, and celebrating great authors and composers, all seen – in 13 distinct parts – through the eyes and dreams of a young girl named Lyubov (which means “love” in Russian).

The Opening Ceremony of the Games in PyeongChang in 2018 featured a historic moment in the Games: athletes from both Koreas marching together as one team at the Opening Ceremony. Meanwhile, the broadcast was upgraded to ultra-high definition (UHD) quality and the 1,218 synchronised drones that flew over the Olympic Stadium on the night of the Opening Ceremony made it into the Guinness World Records.

Table A: Heads of State who have declared the Olympic Winter Games open

| | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>Chamonix 1924</i> | Gaston VIDAL |
| <i>St Moritz 1928</i> | President Edmund SCHULTHESS |
| <i>Lake Placid 1932</i> | Governor Franklin D. ROOSEVELT |
| <i>Garmisch-Partenkirchen 1936</i> | Chancellor Adolf HITLER |
| <i>St Moritz 1948</i> | President Enrico CELIO |
| <i>Oslo 1952</i> | Princess RAGNHILD |
| <i>Cortina d'Ampezzo 1956</i> | President Giovanni GRONCHI |
| <i>Squaw Valley 1960</i> | Vice-President Richard NIXON |
| <i>Innsbruck 1964</i> | President Adolf SCHÄRF |



| | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>Grenoble 1968</i> | President Charles de GAULLE |
| <i>Sapporo 1972</i> | Emperor HIRO-HITO |
| <i>Innsbruck 1976</i> | President Rudolf KIRCHSCHLÄGER |
| <i>Lake Placid 1980</i> | Vice-President Walter MONDALE |
| <i>Sarajevo 1984</i> | President Mika SPILJAK |
| <i>Calgary 1988</i> | Governor-General Jeanne SAUVÉ |
| <i>Albertville 1992</i> | President François MITTERRAND |
| <i>Lillehammer 1994</i> | King Harald V |
| <i>Nagano 1998</i> | Emperor AKIHITO |
| <i>Salt Lake City 2002</i> | President George W. BUSH |
| <i>Turin 2006</i> | President Carlo Azeglio CIAMPI |
| <i>Vancouver 2010</i> | Governor-General Michäelle JEAN |
| <i>Sochi 2014</i> | President Vladimir PUTIN |
| <i>PyeongChang 2018</i> | President Jae-In MOON |

Table B: The last torchbearers in the Olympic relay

| | | |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| <i>Oslo 1952</i> | Eigil NANSEN grandson of Fridtjof NANSEN, the famous explorer | |
| <i>Cortina d'Ampezzo 1956</i> | Guido CAROLI | Speed skating |
| <i>Squaw Valley 1960</i> | Kenneth Charles HENRY | Speed skating |
| <i>Innsbruck 1964</i> | Joseph RIEDER | Alpine skiing |
| <i>Grenoble 1968</i> | Alain CALMAT | Figure skating |
| <i>Sapporo 1972</i> | Hideki TAKADA | Schoolchild |
| <i>Innsbruck 1976</i> | Christl HAAS , Josef FEISTMANTL | Alpine skiing, Luge |
| <i>Lake Placid 1980</i> | Charles Morgan KERR | Team doctor |
| <i>Sarajevo 1984</i> | Sanda DUBRAVČIĆ | Figure skating |
| <i>Calgary 1988</i> | Robyn PERRY | Schoolchild |
| <i>Albertville 1992</i> | Michel PLATINI | Football |
| | François-Cyrille GRANGE | Schoolchild |
| <i>Lillehammer 1994</i> | Crown Prince Hakon Magnus | |
| <i>Nagano 1998</i> | Midori ITO | Figure skating |
| <i>Salt Lake City 2002</i> | 1980 US Olympic ice hockey team | |
| <i>Turin 2006</i> | Stefania BELMONDO | Cross country |
| <i>Vancouver 2010</i> | Catriona LE MAY DOAN ¹ , Steve NASH, Nancy GREENE RAINE, Wayne GRETZKY ² | Speed skating, Basketball, Alpine skiing, Ice hockey |
| <i>Sochi 2014</i> | Vladimir TRETIAK, Irina RODNINA | Ice hockey, Figure skating |
| <i>PyeongChang 2018</i> | Kim YUNA | Figure Ice Skating |

¹ Due to a technical problem, Catriona LE MAY DOAN was not able to light her leg of the Olympic cauldron during the Opening Ceremony. She did however return to relight the cauldron during the Closing Ceremony.

² As the Opening Ceremony took place in an indoor stadium, Wayne GRETZKY carried the flame to light the cauldron that burned during the entire Games period located outside in Jack Poole Plaza.



Table C: Competitors who have taken the oath

| | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Chamonix 1924</i> | Camille MANDRILLON | Military patrol |
| <i>St Moritz 1928</i> | Hans EIDENBENZ | Nordic combined |
| <i>Lake Placid 1932</i> | John Ames SHEA | Speed skating |
| <i>Garmisch-Partenkirchen 1936</i> | Wilhelm BOGNER | Nordic skiing and combined |
| <i>St Moritz 1948</i> | Riccardo TORRIANI | Ice hockey |
| <i>Oslo 1952</i> | Torbjoern FALKANGER | Ski jumping |
| <i>Cortina d'Ampezzo 1956</i> | Giuliana CHENAL MINUZZO | Alpine skiing |
| <i>Squaw Valley 1960</i> | Carol HEISS | Figure skating |
| <i>Innsbruck 1964</i> | Paul ASTE | Bobsleigh |
| <i>Grenoble 1968</i> | Léo LACROIX | Alpine skiing |
| <i>Sapporo 1972</i> | Keiichi SUZUKI | Speed skating |
| <i>Innsbruck 1976</i> | Werner DELLE- KARTH | Bobsleigh |
| <i>Lake Placid 1980</i> | Eric HEIDEN | Speed skating |
| <i>Sarajevo 1984</i> | Boran KRIZAJ | Alpine skiing |
| <i>Calgary 1988</i> | Pierre HARVEY | Nordic skiing |
| <i>Albertville 1992</i> | Surya BONALY | Figure skating |
| <i>Lillehammer 1994</i> | Vegard ULVANG | Nordic skiing |
| <i>Nagano 1998</i> | Kenji OGIWARA | Nordic combined |
| <i>Salt Lake City 2002</i> | Jim SHEA | Skeleton |
| <i>Turin 2006</i> | Giorgio ROCCA | Alpine skiing |
| <i>Vancouver 2010</i> | Hayley WICKENHEISER | Ice hockey |
| <i>Sochi 2014</i> | Ruslan ZAKHAROV | Short-track |
| <i>PyeongChang 2018</i> | Mo TAE-BEOM | Speed skating |

Table D: Officials and coaches who have taken the oath

| | | |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| <i>Sapporo 1972</i> | Fumio ASAKI | |
| <i>Innsbruck 1976</i> | Willy KÖSTINGER | Nordic combined |
| <i>Lake Placid 1980</i> | Terry MC DERMOTT | Speed skating |
| <i>Sarajevo 1984</i> | Dragan PEROVIC | Alpine skiing |
| <i>Calgary 1988</i> | Suzanna MORROW FRANCIS | Figure skating |
| <i>Albertville 1992</i> | Pierre BORNAT | Alpine skiing |
| <i>Lillehammer 1994</i> | Kari KARING | Figure skating |
| <i>Nagano 1998</i> | Junko HIRAMATSU | Figure skating |
| <i>Salt Lake City 2002</i> | Allen CHURCH | Alpine skiing |
| <i>Turin 2006</i> | Fabio BANCHETTI | Short-track speed skating |
| <i>Vancouver 2010</i> | Michel VERRAULT | Short-track speed skating |
| <i>Sochi 2014</i> | Vyacheslav VEDENIN, Jr. Anastasia POPKOVA | Cross country skiing Alpine skiing |
| <i>PyeongChang 2018</i> | Kim WOOSIK Park KI-HO | Snowboard Slopestyle Nordic Combined |

For further information, please contact:

The Olympic Studies Centre

Tel. + 41 21 621 66 11

studies.centre@olympic.org