**BACKGROUND OF OLYMPIC GAMES**

The name “Olympics” comes from the place where the games were first started, the small town of Olympia.

However, a more insightful approach reveals that it is much bigger than a toponym. Olympia was named after the Mount Olympus, the tallest mountain of Greece that was considered the house of Gods. And, according to the myth, the Gods themselves participated in the first Olympic games. And this highlights the importance of the games and the unique background behind the games. Olympic games were held every four years, and they became so prominent that created a legacy that remained alive until the revival of the Modern Olympics.

Aristotle places the date of the first Olympic games to be 776 BC. Before that, the Mediterranean region had a long tradition of athletic and performance events, with representation of athletic scenes in tombs from Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. However, these were part of celebrations and performances that were held to entertain the monarch and the nobles. The main difference with the Olympic games was the introduction of contest and rivalry as well as the ability of everyone to be able to participate and attend. Noteworthy, the first Olympic Champion was Coroebus, a cook from the city of Elis.

**The Ancient Games**

The Ancient Games were much different than today. Despite the innovation of everyone being able to participate, this needs to be placed in the context of the ancient world. Only free men could participate from all Greek cities. There were only a handful of events:

* Running (1-stade =192m), 2-stade =384m), long distance (24 stades), 4 stade race in armor (helmet, shield, and greaves) with an estimate weight about 50-60 lbs.
* Pentathlon (the same athlete participated in discus, javelin, long jump, running and wrestling Boxing (like today, but with fewer rules and goal was to knock out the opponent)
* Equestrian events (chariot racing and horseback riding)
* Pankration (a sport where mixed boxing and wrestling techniques were used but also kicking, holding, and choking on the ground, making it similar to modern mixed martial arts)
* Wrestling (like today, the goal was to throw the opponent on the ground, landing on a hip, shoulder, or back for a fair fall)

The marathon was not an official event in the Olympic Games until the first modern Olympics in 1896, held in Athens, Greece. This event was inspired by the legendary run of Pheidippides, who, according to ancient stories, ran from the battlefield at Marathon to Athens to announce a Greek victory over the Persians in 490 BC. The distance of the first Olympic marathon was approximately 40 kilometres, mirroring the legendary route. This original distance varied slightly in subsequent Games until it was standardized at 26.2 miles (42.195 kilometres) during the 1908 London Olympics to accommodate the British royal family's viewing preferences. Since then, the marathon has been a staple of the Olympics, symbolizing endurance and the spirit of the Games.

For the first 200 years, the games had mostly local and religious character, but over time, the Olympic Games gained increasing recognition, used as one of the units of time/year measurement. Breakthrough changes in the society such as democracy, alphabet, philosophy, and theatre transformed the games with some events to be abandoned (pankration). The Olympics became the most prominent cultural and athletic event in ancient world during the golden era of the Greek Civilization. In that time, the ideals of Olympism evolved, attempting to integrate sport with culture, athletics with education, and international cooperation and peace. In that spirit, a truce during the games was established. Remarkably, the prize was only a crown made from olive leaves, and the winner was entitled to have a statue of himself set up at Olympia. The games stayed active for several hundreds of years with the last games officially held were in 393 AD, with some views suggesting that some games were still held. This makes the Olympic games lasting continuously for more than 1000 years!

**Organization**

At the Congress of Paris in 1894, the control and development of the modern Olympic Games were entrusted to the International Olympic Committee (IOC; Comité International Olympique). During World War I Coubertin moved its headquarters to Lausanne, Switzerland, where they have remained. The IOC is responsible for maintaining the regular celebration of the Olympic Games, seeing that the Games are carried out in the spirit that inspired their revival, and promoting the development of sports throughout the world. The original committee in 1894 consisted of 14 members and Coubertin.

IOC members are regarded as ambassadors from the committee to their national sports organizations. They are in no sense delegates to the committee and may not accept, from the government of their country or from any organization or individual, any instructions that in any way affect their independence.

The IOC is a permanent organization that elects its own members. Reforms in 1999 set the maximum membership at 115, of whom 70 are individuals, 15 current Olympic athletes, 15 national Olympic committee presidents, and 15 international sports federation presidents. The members are elected to renewable eight-year terms, but they must retire at age 70. Term limits were also applied to future presidents.

The IOC elects its president for a period of eight years, at the end of which the president is eligible for reflection for further periods of four years each. The executive board of 15 members holds periodic meetings with the international federations and national Olympic committees. The IOC as a whole meet annually, and a meeting can be convened at any time that one-third of the members so request.

**International Olympic Committee presidents**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Name | Country | Years | No: Years |
| Dimítrios Vikélas | Greece | 1894–1896 | 2 |
| Pierre, baron de Coubertin | France | 1896–1925 | 29 |
| Henri, comte de Baillet-Latour | Belgium | 1925–1942 | 17 |
| J. Sigfrid Edström | Sweden | 1946–1952 | 6 |
| Avery Brundage | United States | 1952–1972 | 20 |
| Michael Morris, Lord Killanin | Ireland | 1972–1980 | 8 |
| Juan António Samaranch | Spain | 1980–2001 | 21 |
| Jacques Rogge | Belgium | 2001–2013 | 12 |
| Thomas Bach | Germany | 2013–present | 12 |
| **Highest number of years** | | |  |

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