



# FACTSHEET

## The Games of the II Olympiad, Paris 1900 and the Games of the VIII Olympiad, Paris 1924

March 2024

### Paris 1900

The first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was an age of remarkable technological progress, with the early years of the automobile, aviation and cinema offering promise of a brave new world. It was against this backdrop that the modern Olympic Games established themselves as part of the new landscape, and the 1900 Games played no small part in helping to write a glorious page in the annals of Olympic and world history.

In 1900, Paris hosted the International Universal Exhibition, and the Games were organised in the framework of this event. The Olympic Games were spread over five months, and there were no real opening and closing ceremonies. Coubertin made plans to hold the Olympics as part of the Exhibition and intended to organise the events, but the Exhibition organisers relegated Coubertin to a relatively minor administrative position and took over the organisation of the related sporting events.

Most of the events we today consider “Olympic” were not even labelled as such in 1900, often being called “Championnats d’Exposition” (“exhibition championships”). Years later, many athletes still did not know they had competed in the Olympic Games, believing that their sport had been just a part of the world’s fair.

A total of 24 NOCs sent delegations to compete at Paris 1900, with almost one thousand athletes taking part. The programme featured 19 sports, and a total of 95 events, many of which have remained regular fixtures on the Olympic programme ever since (such as athletics, rowing, cycling, fencing, football, gymnastics, swimming, equestrian, tennis, shooting, archery, sailing and water polo); a couple more which

have subsequently made their return after a long absence (golf and rugby); and some that were never to feature again (like croquet, jeu de paume and pelota), or which were not recognised by the IOC as official competitions in the first place (including fishing, boule lyonnaise, pétanque, kite-flying, pigeon racing, hunting and hurling!).

**Host election:** Paris was selected to host the Games of the II Olympiad in 1900 during the Sorbonne Congress in Paris on 23 June 1894, after Athens had been selected to host the first modern Games, the Games of the I Olympiad.

**Dates:** from 14 May to 28 October 1900.

**Participants:** 24 NOCs, 95 events and 997 athletes (975 men, 22 women).

**Ceremonies:** There was no official opening of the Games, but on 3 June, gymnasts paraded in the “Vélodrome de Vincennes” during the Federal Meeting of the Union of Gymnastics Associations of France.

**Lighting of the Olympic flame by:** A symbolic fire was first lit at the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam.

**Olympic Oath sworn by:** The athletes’ oath was first sworn at the 1920 Olympic Games in Antwerp.

**Medals:** In some sports, medals were not awarded. Most of the listed prizes were cups and other similar trophies. The medals were designed for the Universal Exhibition by Frederique Vernon, with on the obverse a winged goddess holding laurel branches in both hands, arms raised. In the background, underneath, there is a view of Paris and the monuments of the Universal Exhibition. On the reverse, there is a victorious athlete standing on a podium, holding a laurel branch in his right hand, arm raised with a stadium and the Acropolis of Athens in the background.



**Poster:** No main poster was produced for the general promotion of these Games. However, specific posters were created by the organisers of the Universal Exhibition for some of the sporting contests. The one used nowadays shows a female fencer dressed in black, holding the traditional weapons of sports fencing: foil, epee and sabre. In the context of the history of sport, showing a female athlete was unusual at the time. Moreover, women did not take part in the Olympic fencing competitions in 1900, and had to wait until 1924. The Olympic nature of the competition is not mentioned on the poster.

### **Women's participation**

Women made their Olympic debut in tennis and golf. British tennis player Charlotte Cooper was the first woman to earn the title of Olympic champion in an individual event. In the final of the women's singles, she beat Hélène Prévost (FRA) 6-1, 6-4. In sailing, Hélène de Pourtalès (SUI) won a gold and a silver medal. She was competing in the 1-2 ton boat class with her husband and her nephew on a boat called *Lérina*. She's the first woman to take part in an Olympic competition and also the first female Olympic champion. In sports such as polo, football, sailing, tug-of-war, rowing and tennis, medals were won by teams comprising athletes of different nationalities.

One name that has gone down in Olympic history is that of Charlotte Cooper, who was the best female tennis player of her generation. On 11 July 1900, on the courts of the Ile de Puteaux in the middle of the Seine, the Briton defeated France's Hélène Prévost, 6-1 6-4 to win the women's singles final. In doing so Cooper became the first woman to win an individual Olympic title. A few days earlier, she had teamed up with R.F. Doherty, himself a winner of three medals in Paris, to claim the mixed doubles title.

Then there was Margaret Abbott, the young arts student from Chicago (USA), who went to Paris with her mother Mary to visit the Exposition Universelle. Both mother and daughter signed up to take part in the international golf tournament, which took place on the course at Compiègne. On 4 October, Margaret recorded the best round (47) on the nine-hole course to win the gold medal. In doing so she became the first American woman to win Olympic

gold, but she remained unaware of her feat right until her death in 1955. With golf subsequently excluded from the Olympic programme, she also remained the reigning women's golf champion for the next 116 years.

### **Venues**

Fifteen competition venues were used for the Olympic Games Paris 1900, eight of which remain in use today. In the absence of an Olympic Stadium, the main venue was the Vélodrome de Vincennes, which hosted six sports in all. There was no official Olympic Village.

Eleven of the competition venues already existed, one was new (the military camp in Satory used for the shooting events) and three were temporary (the Place de Breteuil for equestrian jumping, one on the Champ de Mars and another in the Jardin des Tuileries for fencing). Many of the remaining venues are home to sports clubs and provide recreational and sporting facilities for their members and visitors.

Four of the venues were later used at the Olympic Games Paris 1924: the Vélodrome de Vincennes, the Terrain de Polo de Bagatelle, the Palais de la Société des Régates du Havre, and the Cercle de la Voile de Paris.

The stands at the Vélodrome de Vincennes were built by Gustave Eiffel, who designed and oversaw the construction of the Eiffel Tower. The velodrome also staged a cricket match as part of the 1900 Games. The game was played on the infield, between two Paris clubs made up almost entirely of British immigrants.

### **Heroes of the Games**

- Al Kraenzlein (USA) four gold medals in athletics.
- Konrad Stäheli (SUI) three gold medals and one bronze in shooting.
- John Jarvis (GBR) two gold medals in swimming and one gold in water polo.
- Ray Ewry (USA) three gold medals in athletics.
- Irv Baxter (USA) two gold and three silver medals in athletics.
- Hubert Van Innis (BEL) two gold and two silver medals in archery.



## Did you know?

In the long jump competition after the qualification round, Myer Prinstein was leading. Because of his religious beliefs, he refused to take part in the final, as this was scheduled for a Sunday. In the final, his compatriot and rival Alvin Kraenzlein, one of the stars of the Games with his four gold medals, beat him by one centimetre.

## Sailing events at two venues

The sailing regattas took place on the Seine, but in two places: in Meulan, 20km downstream from Paris, and in the port of Le Havre, located at the mouth of the Seine. This was due to the big draught of certain boats which prevented them from sailing up the river. The categories were established according to the number of tons the boat weighed (the norm at the time).

## A single spectator for croquet

The croquet event had only French players, who were actually from Paris, but the only entry ticket sold for the competition was bought by an Englishman, who had travelled from Nice especially for the occasion.

## Many and victorious Frenchmen

French athletes won many medals at these Games. Not only because there were many more of them than athletes from the foreign delegations, but also because certain events were entered only by French competitors.

## Demanding gymnastics

In gymnastics, to win the title in the individual all-round event, the athlete had to shine in 16 different movements to be performed on several pieces of apparatus. Some exercises of this era, such as the 50kg stone lifting or the rope climbing, disappeared from gymnastics some time afterwards, while others, like the pole vault, changed sport.

## Equestrian sport made its Olympic debut

Among the five events contested at the Place de Breteuil arena – for the first and only time – were long and high jump competitions!

## Rubber man

Raymond Clarence Ewry, known as Ray Ewry, won all three jumping events in Paris 1900 to earn himself

the nickname of “Rubber Man”. In his Olympic career, Ewry won eight Olympic gold medals in 1900, 1904 and 1908, yet he is almost unknown today because his unprecedented feats were performed in events that are no longer held: the standing high jump, the standing long jump and the standing triple jump.

## The front crawl

The swimming competition, which took place on the River Seine between Courbevoie and the bridge at Asnières, proved a success, attracting plenty of interest and athletes from a wide spread of countries. The Australian contingent caused a stir by introducing a new swimming style, front crawl, or in modern Olympic parlance, freestyle.

## Paris 1924

The Paris Games signalled the acceptance of the Games as a major event with widespread appeal. The number of participating National Olympic Committees (NOCs) jumped from 29 to 44. This newfound popularity was confirmed by the presence of over 1,000 journalists. The proposal of Paris as Olympic host was made by Pierre de Coubertin himself. When he had announced his retirement as an IOC President in 1921 – in a poignant letter sent to his IOC colleagues – he asked them to grant him one last wish “... in favour of (my) native city, Paris ...” and award the 1924 Olympics to his birthplace. These Games saw the first participation by Uruguay, Poland, the Philippines, Lithuania, Latvia, Ireland and Ecuador. The sporting events were largely dominated by the athletes from the United States, who won 99 medals including 45 gold medals out of 126. The Olympic motto – “Citius, Altius, Fortius” – was used officially for the first time at the Games.

**Dates:** 4 May to 27 July 1924.

**Participants:** 44 NOCs, 126 events, 3,089 athletes (2,954 men, 135 women).

**Olympic oath (athletes) by:** Georges André, athletics.

**Officially opened by:** President Gaston Doumergue.

**Emblem:** emblem of the City of Paris.

**Ceremonies:** At the Closing Ceremony, the practice of raising three flags (that of the IOC, that of the host country and that of the host country of the next edition of the Games) was introduced.



**Lighting of the Olympic flame by:** No lighting. A symbolic fire was first lit at the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam.

### **Host selection**

The election of the Olympic host for 1924 took place during the 20<sup>th</sup> IOC Session in June 1921. The vote for 1924 was carried out at the same time as that for the 1928 host. The IOC eliminated Los Angeles and Rome for 1924 during the debate that took place before the actual vote. Amsterdam was proposed instead for 1928. As such, the IOC members were asked to vote on the proposal that Paris should get the 1924 Games and Amsterdam the 1928 Games. The result was 14 votes for, 4 against and 1 abstention in all three rounds.

**Medals:** The medals were designed by André Rivaud, with, on the obverse, a naked victorious athlete taking the hand of his rival, seated on the ground, to help him to get up. Underneath, the Olympic rings. On the reverse, there is a harp as a symbol of the cultural programme of the Games and various items of sports equipment, winter as well as summer, forming an arch. In the centre, the inscription in capitals reads: "VIII<sup>eme</sup> Olympiade Paris 1924"

**Poster:** Designed by French artist Jean Droit, the poster shows a group of athletes making the Olympic salute. In front of them are palm leaves, a symbol of victory, and the Paris coat of arms. The French flag floats in the background. Of the 150 designs received by the OCOG, two were kept and used to promote the Games. Droit's poster is now used as the official poster of the Games for Paris 1924, but at that time some 10,000 copies of each of the posters were printed, over half of which were intended to be sent abroad.

### **Women's competitions**

Women competed in four disciplines: diving (two events), fencing (foil individual), swimming (five events) and tennis (three events). In sailing, Swiss travel writer and photographer Ella Maillart became the first woman to skip a boat in Olympic competition. Trudy Ederle (USA) won three medals in the swimming events in Paris (one gold and two bronze). In 1926, she became the first woman to swim the English Channel, starting in France and finishing in England.

### **Venues**

Twenty-one competition venues were used for the Olympic Games Paris 1924, 12 of which remain in use today. Sixteen of the competition venues already existed, three were new and two were temporary.

Four of the venues had been used at the Olympic Games Paris 1900: the Vélodrome de Vincennes, the Terrain de Polo de Bagatelle, the Palais de la Société des Régates du Havre and the Cercle de la Voile de Paris. The Stade Olympique de Colombes will be hosting field hockey matches at the Olympic Games Paris 2024. All but four of the venues are/were in the Paris area. The Stade Olympique de Colombes hosted the Opening and Closing Ceremonies and several of the competitions. The official Olympic Village, a temporary facility, was the first of its kind, and was dismantled after the Games.

### **Heroes of the Games**

- Paavo Nurmi (FIN) five gold medals in athletics.
- Ville Ritola (FIN) four gold and two silver medals in athletics.
- Roger Ducret (FRA) three gold and two silver medals in fencing.
- Johnny Weissmuller (USA) three gold medals in swimming and one bronze in water polo.
- Vincent Richards (USA) two golds and one silver in tennis.
- Ole Andreas Lilloy-Olsen (NOR) two golds and one silver in shooting.

### **Did you know?**

#### **Venue preparation**

To help guide competitors and ensure they swam straight, the bottom of the swimming pool at the Stade Nautique des Tourelles was marked out with lines. In preparation for the equestrian competitions at the Stade Olympique de Colombes, 1,500 cubic metres of sand were spread on to the pitch during the night of 20/21 July. The final of the Olympic football tournament at the Stade Olympique de Colombes attracted a huge crowd, and more than 15,000 people were turned away.

#### **Nurmi the "Flying Finn"**

Finnish runner Paavo Nurmi won five gold medals to add to the three he had won in 1920. His most spectacular performance came on 10 July. First, he easily won the 1500m and then, a mere 55 minutes



later, he returned to the track to win the 5,000m. Nurmi made his Olympic debut at the 1920 Antwerp Games. He took the competition by storm, winning gold medals in the 10,000m, the cross-country individual and the team event. He also claimed a silver in the 5,000m. At the 1928 Games in Amsterdam, Nurmi completed his Olympic career by winning the 10,000m and earning silver medals in the 5,000m and the steeplechase.

#### **A 500m track and the last Olympic cross-country**

In athletics, the events took place on the track of the Stade de Colombes. For the last time in Olympic history the length of the track was 500 metres. Since then, a 400-metre track has always been used at the Games. It was the last appearance of the cross-country event on the programme of the Games. Ran in very hot conditions close to 45 degrees, 23 athletes of the 38 on the start line did not finish the event, which was eventually won by Paavo Nurmi ahead of another Finn, Ville Ritola, and the American, Earl Johnson.

#### **Hollywood material**

American swimmer Johnny Weissmuller won three golds. He won the 100 and 400 metre freestyle races, another gold in the 4×200 metre freestyle relay, and a bronze in water polo. He would compete in the 1928 Olympics as well, winning two further golds, and then turned to Hollywood where he became famous as Tarzan, portraying the character in 12 films. The Paris Games themselves became immortalised in “Chariots of Fire”, the Oscar-winning film by Hugh Hudson about principled British runner Eric Liddell.

#### **A horse parade at the closing ceremony**

At the time, the last event was not the marathon as is frequently the case nowadays, but the equestrian jumping events. At the Closing Ceremony of the Paris Games, the horses and their riders, all in military uniforms, came into the stadium for a kind of parade and for their medal ceremony.

#### **American sensation in tennis**

This was the last appearance of tennis until the 1988 Games. In the women’s tournament, the 18-year-old American sensation, Helen Wills, who would ultimately win eight Wimbledon titles and become

America’s first female global sports celebrity, beat the French champion, Julie Vlasto, for the gold.

#### **Radio coverage**

Partially live radio coverage was produced during the Olympic Games in Paris in 1924. At this time, the organisers feared that radio would have a negative impact on the sale of entry tickets, so its beginnings were therefore hindered. For the Games, Edmond Dehorter commented on the key events live for Radio Paris, and even tried to do it from a hot-air balloon, high above both the Vélodrome d’Hiver and the Stade de Colombes.

#### **Rope climbing and Czechoslovakian dominance**

In gymnastics, it was the last edition of the Games with no women’s competitions. They made their Olympic debut in 1928. Athletes from Czechoslovakia won nine medals, including the gold in rope climbing.

#### **Military officers and new format**

In equestrian sports, the events were contested only by men and military officers. For the first time, the format of the eventing part was that still known today: a dressage part, an endurance ride, and a jumping competition.

#### **First title for Uruguay and last appearance of rugby 15s**

In football, the Uruguayan team led by José Nasazzi defeated Switzerland 3-0 in the final to win the gold medal.

Rugby in its 15-a-side format made its last Olympic appearance in 1924. The competition was won by the US team for the second time over France in front of a vociferous crowd. Rugby would return to the Olympic programme in 2016 in Rio in the form of rugby sevens.

For further information, please contact:

**The Olympic Studies Centre**

[studies.centre@olympic.org](mailto:studies.centre@olympic.org)