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OLYMPISM AND THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT

WHAT IS OLYMPISM?

A philosophy of life.

An ideal: the combination of sport, culture and education.

Olympic values.

Olympic symbol and other identifying elements.



THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT: HOW DOES IT WORK?

The structure of the Olympic Movement: the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the National Olympic Committees (NOCs), the International Sports Federations (IFs) and the Organising Committees for the Olympic Games (OCOGs).

ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THE GAMES

Actions on various fronts 365 days a year: Sport for All, development through sport; equal opportunities; education and culture; sport for peace, the environment and sustainable development; protecting the health of athletes; combating illegal sports betting.

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HISTORICAL MILESTONES

Creation of the IOC in 1894 in Paris (France), on the initiative of Pierre de Coubertin.

The eight presidents over a century.

The IOC headquarters, in Lausanne (Switzerland) since 1915.

This is a PDF interactive file. The headings of each page contain hyperlinks, which allow to move from chapter to chapter.



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Cover: OG London 2012, Opening Ceremony – Entry of the Olympic flag into the stadium.

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WHAT IS OLYMPISM?

Olympism is a philosophy of life which places sport at the service of humanity. This philosophy is based on the interaction of the qualities of the body, will and mind. Olympism is expressed through actions which link sport to culture and education.

This philosophy is an essential element of the Olympic Movement and the celebration of the Games. It is also what makes them unique.

The pursuit of this ideal and the other “fundamental principles of Olympism” [set out in the *Olympic Charter*] gives rise to a series of values, which are applicable both on the field of play and in everyday life.

The IOC has identified the following three Olympic values:

Excellence In the Olympic ideal, this value refers to giving one’s best, on the field of play or in life, without measuring oneself with others, but above all aiming at reaching one’s personal objectives with determination in the effort.

It is not only about winning, but mainly about participating, making progress against personal goals, striving to be and to do our best in our daily lives and benefiting from the combination of a strong body, will and mind.

Friendship Men and women are at the centre of the Olympic Movement’s focus encouraging the links and mutual understanding between people. This value broadly refers to building a peaceful and better world through solidarity, team spirit, joy and optimism in sport. The Olympic Games inspire humanity to overcome political, economic, gender, racial or religious differences and forge friendships in spite of those differences. The athletes express this value by forming life-long bonds with their team-mates, as well as their opponents.

Respect In the Olympic ideal, this value represents the ethical principle that should inspire all who participate in the Olympic programmes. It includes respect for oneself and one’s body, respect for one another, for rules and for the environment. It thus refers to the fair play that each athlete has to display in sport, as well as avoiding doping.

1. OG London 2012. Athletics, 5000m Men – Qualifications. Mohamed FARAH (GBR) 1st congratulates René Herrera (PHI) at the end of the race. © 2012 / International Olympic Committee (IOC) / FURLONG, Christopher

It was also Pierre de Coubertin who had the idea of an Olympic flag. He presented the rings and the flag in June 1914 in Paris, at the Olympic Congress. But as the First World War prevented the Games from being celebrated as planned in Berlin in 1916, it was not until 1920 at the Games in Antwerp that the flag with its five rings was flown in an Olympic stadium for the first time.



These values are powerfully conveyed at the time of the Olympic Games. However, between editions of the Games, the Olympic Movement continues to be spread through the ongoing work of the members of the Olympic family.

The values and meaning of Olympism are expressed by the Olympic symbol (the five rings) and other identifying Olympic elements (the flame, the torch relay, the motto, the maxim, the anthem and the oaths). These make it possible to transmit a message simply and directly. They give the Olympic Movement and the Games their own identity.

It was Baron Pierre de Coubertin who revived the Games. Born in 1863, he devoted his life to the reform of education and youth in France. Fascinated by the English education system, which included sport in the teaching programme (a new idea at the time), he sought to convince his contemporaries in France that sport could be beneficial for young people. Not everyone shared this view, and so Coubertin looked for a way to make people change their views. That was when he had an idea: to revive the Olympic Games.

While this was not the first attempt to revive the Games, Coubertin brought a modern and international dimension and succeeded in re-establishing them. But for him, the Games were not an end in themselves. Rather they were part of a much broader project: education through sport.

THE OLYMPIC SYMBOL: THE FIVE RINGS

A very powerful symbol, the five rings are the visual representation of Olympism. It was Pierre de Coubertin himself who designed the symbol. The five rings represent the five continents. They are interlinked to show the universality of Olympism and how athletes from all over the world come together for the Olympic Games. On the Olympic flag, the rings appear against a white background. Combined in this way, the six colours of the flag (blue, yellow, black, green, red and white) represent all the nations. It is therefore not the case that each of the colours is associated with a particular continent. Today, the symbol is one of the most widely recognised in the world. Its use is subject to very strict rules enacted by the IOC. It is important to note that there is just one Olympic symbol. For the other identifying elements described below, other terms are needed.

*1. © 2002 Getty Images
News and Sport*



OTHER ELEMENTS OF THE OLYMPIC IDENTITY:

› The flame and torch relay

(see “*The Olympic flame and the Torch Relay*”)

With the flag, the Olympic flame and torch relay are the most well-known elements of the Games.

At the modern Games, the Olympic flame is an expression of the positive values that human beings have always associated with the symbolism of fire.

The flame is lit at Olympia in Greece, recalling the Ancient Greek roots of the Olympic Games and also emphasising the link between the ancient and modern Games.

From Olympia, the flame is carried to the city hosting the Games by thousands of torchbearers. Wherever it goes, the flame announces the Olympic Games and transmits a message of peace and friendship to all those it meets along the way. It also promotes the culture and natural riches of the regions through which it passes.

The flame recalls the ancient Olympic Games, during which a sacred fire burnt on the altar of Zeus. However, the symbolism of the relay is linked not to these Games but to the torch races, or *lampadedromia*, held in Athens in honour of the gods associated with fire.

At the modern Olympic Games, a flame was lit for the first time in the stadium at Amsterdam, in 1928. For its part, the torch relay was not introduced until the 1936 Games in Berlin.

› The motto and maxim

A motto is a phrase or a few words expressing a way of life or a code of conduct. The Olympic motto is composed of three Latin words: CITIUS-ALTIUS-FORTIUS, which mean

FASTER – HIGHER –
STRONGER

These three words encourage the athletes to give their best when they compete. To better understand the motto, we can compare it with the Olympic maxim: The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not winning but taking part;

the essential thing in life is not conquering but fighting well.

Taken together, the Olympic motto and maxim represent an ideal which Coubertin believed in and promoted as an important lesson for life learned from taking part in a sports activity and the Olympic Games. Giving one's

1. The Olympic Flame is passed between torches
© Getty Images



best and striving for personal excellence form a laudable goal. This is a lesson which still holds true today, not just for athletes but for every one of us.

The three Latin words became the Olympic motto in 1894, when the IOC was created. Pierre de Coubertin proposed the motto, which he had borrowed from his friend Henri Didon, a Dominican priest who taught his pupils sport near Paris.

The idea for the maxim came later, following a sermon given by the Bishop of Pennsylvania, Ethelbert Talbot, during the 1908 Games in London.

› The anthem and oaths

The Olympic anthem and the oaths (taken by an athlete, a referee and a coach) are part of the official protocol of the Olympic Games opening ceremonies. Those who take them are nationals of the host country, and they hold a corner of the Olympic flag as they say the words.

The Olympic anthem was composed by Spiros Samaras (music) and Kostis Palamas (words). Although played for the first time in 1896, at the first modern Games in Athens, it became the IOC's official anthem only in 1958.

Like the athletes at the ancient Games, today's Olympic athletes take an oath. The words of this oath were written by Pierre de Coubertin, and it was spoken for the first time at the 1920 Games in Antwerp. The referees' oath first featured at the Opening Ceremony of the Games in 1972, while the coaches' oath was introduced at the 2012 Games in London.

It is important to note that the oaths have been modified over the years to reflect the changing nature of sports competition. For example, the reference to doping was added to the athletes' oath at the 2000 Games in Sydney.

1. OG Los Angeles 1984, Opening Ceremony – Track and field athlete Edwin Moses is taking the oath in the name of all athletes. © 1984 / Los Angeles Times (entitled parties) GALVEZ, José