



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

Olympic Studies Centre

AQUATICS: History of Swimming at the Olympic Games

Reference document

Introduction, key stages and evolution in the number of events from this discipline's beginnings to the present time.

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Swimming

Introduction

Swimming has featured on the programme of all the Summer Olympic Games. In the first half of the 20th century, only the “freestyle”, “breaststroke” and “backstroke” styles were present. It was only in [1956](#) that “butterfly” was introduced. Women’s swimming made its debut in [1912](#) and has been on the programme ever since. The women’s programme now has the same number of events as the men’s.

Key stages

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Entry | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1894: At the Paris Congress held in June, the desire was expressed for water sports (rowing, sailing and swimming) to be on the Olympic programme. |
| Women’s entry | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1910: In the minutes of the 13th IOC Session (Luxembourg), published in the Olympic Review (June 1910), it was announced that women would undoubtedly be accepted for swimming at the Games of the V Olympiad in Stockholm in 1912.• 1911: At the 14th IOC Session held in May in Budapest, a request was made to add a 300m and 400m (team) race for women on the programme of the Games of the V Olympiad in Stockholm in 1912. The Organising Committee promised to do its utmost to fulfil this request.• 1912: At the 15th IOC Session held in July in Stockholm, it was decided to divide the sports on the programme into three categories: indispensable, desirable and eligible. Swimming was among the first category.• 1934: At the 33rd IOC Session held in May in Athens, women’s participation in some sports was called into question. A vote was held, and women’s participation in swimming was accepted unanimously. |
| Butterfly | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1954: At the 50th IOC Session held in Athens in May, it was decided that, for the Games of the XVI Olympiad in Melbourne in 1956, no new event would be accepted, with the exception of men’s and women’s butterfly, which would be added to the programme. |
| 10km open water | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2005: At the IOC Executive Board meeting in October in Lausanne, it was agreed to add the men’s and women’s 10km open water event for the programme of the Games of the XXIX Olympiad in Beijing in 2008. |



Evolution in the number of events

- 1896: 4 events (men's)
- 1900: 7 events (men's)
- 1904: 9 events (men's)
- 1908: 6 events (men's)
- 1912: 9 events (7 men's and 2 women's)
- 1920: 10 events (7 men's and 3 women's)
- 1924-1952: 11 events (6 men's and 5 women's)
- 1956: 13 events (7 men's and 6 women's)
- 1960: 15 events (8 men's and 7 women's)
- 1964: 18 events (10 men's and 8 women's)
- 1968-1972: 29 events (15 men's and 14 women's)
- 1976-1980: 26 events (13 men's and 13 women's)
- 1984: 29 events (15 men's and 14 women's)
- 1988-1992: 31 events (16 men's and 15 women's)
- 1996-2004: 32 events (16 men's and 16 women's)
- 2008-2016: 34 events (17 men's and 17 women's)

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Men's events

| Swimming men | 1896 | 1900 | 1904 | 1908 | 1912 | 1920 | 1924 | 1928 | 1932 | 1936 | 1948 | 1952 | 1956 | 1960 | 1964 | 1968 | 1972 | 1976 | 1980 | 1984 | 1988 | 1992 | 1996 | 2000 | 2004 | 2008 | 2012 | 2016 | Total | |
|-----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----|
| 50y freestyle | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | |
| 50m freestyle | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 8 |
| 100m freestyle (1) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 27 |
| 200m freestyle (2) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 15 |
| 400m freestyle (3) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 27 |
| 880y freestyle | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| 1500m freestyle (4) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 28 |
| 4000m freestyle | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| 100m freestyle for sailors | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Underwater swimming | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| 200m obstacle event | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| 200m team swimming | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| 100m backstroke (5) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 25 |
| 200m backstroke | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 15 |
| Plunge for distance | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| 440y breaststroke | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| 100m breaststroke | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 13 |
| 200m breaststroke | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 25 |
| 400m breaststroke | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| 100m butterfly | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 13 |
| 200m butterfly | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 16 |
| 200m medley | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 11 |
| 400m medley | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 14 |
| 4x100m freestyle relay | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 12 |
| 4x200m freestyle relay | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 25 |
| 4x100m medley relay | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 15 |
| Marathon 10km | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| Number of events men | 4 | 7 | 9 | 6 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 10 | 15 | 15 | 13 | 13 | 15 | 16 | 16 | 16 | 16 | 16 | 17 | 17 | 17 | 28 | |

- (1) The distance of the 100m freestyle event was 100 yards (91.44m) in 1904
- (2) The distance of the 200m freestyle event was 220 yards (201.17m) in 1904
- (3) The distance of the 400m freestyle event was 500m in 1896 and 440 yards (402.34m) in 1904
- (4) The distance of the 1500m freestyle event was 1200m in 1896, 1000m in 1900 and 1 mile (1609.34m) in 1904
- (5) The distance of the 100m backstroke was 100 yards (91.44m) in 1904



Women's events

| Swimming women | 1896 | 1900 | 1904 | 1908 | 1912 | 1920 | 1924 | 1928 | 1932 | 1936 | 1948 | 1952 | 1956 | 1960 | 1964 | 1968 | 1972 | 1976 | 1980 | 1984 | 1988 | 1992 | 1996 | 2000 | 2004 | 2008 | 2012 | 2016 | Total | |
|-------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----|
| 50m freestyle | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 8 | |
| 100m freestyle | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 24 |
| 200m freestyle | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 13 |
| 400m freestyle (1) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 23 | |
| 800m freestyle | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 13 | |
| 100m backstroke | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 22 | |
| 200m backstroke | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 13 | |
| 100m breaststroke | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 13 | |
| 200m breaststroke | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 22 | |
| 100m butterfly | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 16 | |
| 200m butterfly | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 13 | |
| 200m medley | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 11 | |
| 400m medley | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 14 | |
| 4x100m freestyle relay | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 24 | |
| 4x200m freestyle relay | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 6 | |
| 4x100m medley relay | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 15 | |
| Marathon 10km | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 3 | |
| Number of events women | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 14 | 14 | 13 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 15 | 16 | 16 | 16 | 17 | 17 | 17 | 24 | |

(1) The distance of the 400m freestyle event was 300m in 1920

Total

| Swimming | 1896 | 1900 | 1904 | 1908 | 1912 | 1920 | 1924 | 1928 | 1932 | 1936 | 1948 | 1952 | 1956 | 1960 | 1964 | 1968 | 1972 | 1976 | 1980 | 1984 | 1988 | 1992 | 1996 | 2000 | 2004 | 2008 | 2012 | 2016 | Total |
|-------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Number of events | 4 | 7 | 9 | 6 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 13 | 15 | 18 | 29 | 29 | 26 | 26 | 29 | 31 | 31 | 32 | 32 | 32 | 34 | 34 | 34 | 28 |

Grey column total = number of times on the programme