



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

FACTSHEET

OPENING CEREMONY OF THE OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES

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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 city 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 58 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:

- The parade of the participants;
- The speech by the President of the Organising Committee of the Olympic Games;
- The speech by the IOC President;
- The playing of the Olympic anthem and the entry and raising of the Olympic flag;
- The last stage of the Olympic torch relay and the lighting of the Olympic cauldron;
- The symbolic release of pigeons;
- The taking of the Olympic oath by an athlete;

- The taking of the Olympic oath by an official;
- The national anthem of the host country;
- The artistic programme.

PROTOCOL ELEMENTS OF THE OPENING CEREMONY:

1. THE PARADE OF PARTICIPANTS

The parade of the participants reflects both the changing world and the growth of the Olympic Movement. The number of National Olympic Committees (NOCs) present at the Opening Ceremony has increased from 22 in 1908 to 202 in Athens in 2004 and from 16 to 80 for the Winter Olympic Games. According to tradition, 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. Therefore, in Turin, the Italian delegation paraded last, behind flag-bearer Carolina Kostner. Each delegation is led in by its flag and a board displaying its name.

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 Sydney in 2000, and again in Athens and Turin.

2. THE HEAD OF STATE DECLARES THE GAMES OPEN

According to the Olympic Charter protocol that has existed for several years, the duty of declaring the Games officially open falls to the Head of State of the host country. Among the personalities that have performed this task are



royalty and presidents, and, in accordance with acceptable political protocol within the country and with IOC approval, their representatives, whether it be a vice-president, a member of the royal family, or a governor-general. Since the Olympic Winter Games in Chamonix in 1924, 14 heads of state have opened the Olympic Winter Games. **See table A.**

3. THE OLYMPIC ANTHEM

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 the Tokyo Session. This anthem was created in 1896 for the first Games of the Olympiad in Athens, but for the Olympic Winter Games it was played for the first time in Squaw Valley in 1960.

4. THE OLYMPIC FLAG

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 in Antwerp in 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, and 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 of the fact that at least one of these colours can be seen in the flag of every nation.

5. THE OLYMPIC FLAME AND TORCH RELAY

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. There were however torch races (*lapadedromia*) in Ancient Greece. The ceremonial aspect of the Olympic flame has not always been linked to Olympia, Greece. In fact,

for the Olympic Winter Games in 1952 and 1960, the flame was lit in the hearth of the home of a Norwegian skiing pioneer, Sondre Norheim, in Morgedal. And in 1956, it was lit in the Capitol in Rome. 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.**

The arrival of the Olympic flame at the Opening Ceremony of the Games in Turin was much more than a protocol element indicating the start of a new edition of the Games. It will also represent the end of a unique journey. Carried over 11,000 kilometres, the flame will have gone through all the Italian provinces, Sicily and Sardinia, before going back to the Alps and making a symbolic diversion through the town of Albertville, which hosted the Games in 1992.

6. THE SYMBOLIC RELEASE OF PIGEONS

As doves are the symbol of peace, it is no surprise that the Opening Ceremony protocol calls for a symbolic release of these birds. In fact, from the time that this element was officially introduced into Opening Ceremony protocol at the Games of the VII Olympiad in Antwerp in 1920, it has always been stipulated in subsequent editions of the Olympic Charter that it would be a symbolic release of pigeons. 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 Seoul Games, this part of the protocol was moved, but not eliminated. Today, the symbolic release of the pigeons follows the lighting of the Olympic cauldron.

7. THE TAKING OF THE OLYMPIC OATH BY A COMPETITOR

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 modern Olympic oath was written by Pierre de Coubertin, but has been modified over time to reflect the changing nature of the sporting competition. The version of the oath taken by Italian athlete Giorgio Rocca (alpine skiing) in Turin in 2006 was introduced in 1999. **See table C.**

“In the name of all competitors I promise that we shall take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules which govern them, committing ourselves to a sport without doping and without drugs, in the true spirit of sportsmanship, for the glory of sport and the honour of our teams.” (Olympic Charter, 2003, p. 104)

8. THE TAKING OF THE OLYMPIC OATH BY AN OFFICIAL

Since 1972, a judge or official from the host country also takes an oath. In 2006, Fabio Bianchetti, a figure skating official pronounced the following oath: “In the name of all the judges and officials, I promise that we shall officiate in these Olympic Games with complete impartiality, respecting and abiding by the rules which govern them, in the true spirit of sportsmanship.” (Olympic Charter, 2003, p. 104) **See table D.**

9. THE ARTISTIC PROGRAMME

Once the national anthem of the host country has been played, the show begins. Usually, the content 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. Salt Lake City by the organisers evoked the journey of the Child of Light to “Light the Fire Within”. On 10 February 2006, the organisers and Marco Balich’s team offered an unforgettable show to the 27,000 spectators present, and the millions of television viewers, illustrating the values of brotherhood and dialogue between people and cultures, to prove, if need be, that “Passion Lived Here”.

SOURCE

Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Winter Games / February 2008

http://www.olympic.org/fr/games/index_fr.asp
Miquel de Moragas i Spà, John MacAloon and Montserrat Llinés (eds), *Olympic Ceremonies: Historical continuity and cultural exchange*, Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 1996.



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

Chamonix 1924	Gaston VIDAL
St Moritz 1928	President Edmund SCHULTHESS
Lake Placid 1932	Governor Franklin D. ROOSEVELT
Garmisch-Partenkirchen 1936	Chancellor Adolf HITLER
St Moritz 1948	President Enrico CELIO
Oslo 1952	Princess Ragnhild
Cortina d'Ampezzo 1956	President Giovanni GRONCHI
Squaw Valley 1960	Vice-President Richard NIXON
Innsbruck 1964	President Adolf SCHÄRF
Grenoble 1968	President Charles de GAULLE
Sapporo 1972	Emperor HIRO-HITO
Innsbruck 1976	President Rudolf KIRCHSCHLÄGER
Lake Placid 1980	Vice-President Walter MONDALE
Sarajevo 1984	President Mika SPILJAK
Calgary 1988	Governor General Jeanne SAUVÉ
Albertville 1992	President François MITTERRAND
Lillehammer 1994	King Harald V
Nagano 1998	Emperor AKIHITO
Salt Lake City 2002	President George W. BUSH
Torino 2006	President Carlo Azeglio CAMPI

Table B: The last torchbearers in the Olympic relay

Oslo 1952	Eigil NANSEN grandson of Fridtjof NANSEN, the famous explorer	
Cortina d'Ampezzo 1956	Guido CAROLI	Speed skating
Squaw Valley 1960	Kenneth Charles HENRI	Speed skating
Innsbruck 1964	Joseph RIEDER	Alpine skiing
Grenoble 1968	Alain CALMAT	Figure skating
Sapporo 1972	Hideki TAKADA	Schoolchild
Innsbruck 1976	Christl HAAS et Josef FEISTMANTL Alpine skiing and luge	
Lake Placid 1980	Dr Charles Morgan KERR Team doctor	
Sarajevo 1984	Sandra DUBRAVCIC	Figure skating
Calgary 1988	Robin PERRY	Schoolchild
Albertville 1992	Michel PLATINI Football and François Cyril GRANGE Schoolchild	
Lillehammer 1994	S.A.R. le prince Hakon Magnus	
Nagano 1998	Midori ITO	Figure skating
Salt Lake City 2002	1980 U.S. Ice Hockey team	
Torino 2006	Stefania BELMONDO	Cross country

Table C: Competitors who have taken the oath

Chamonix 1924	Camille MANDRILLON	Military patrol
St Moritz 1928	Hans EIDENBENZ	Nordic combined
Lake Placid 1932	John Ames SHEA	Speed skating
Garmisch-Partenkirchen 1936	Wilhelm BOGNER	Nordic skiing and combined
St Moritz 1948	Riccardo TORRIANI	Ice hockey
Oslo 1952	Torbjorn FALKANGER	Ski jumping
Cortina d'Ampezzo 1956	Giulana CHENAL MINUZZO	Alpine skiing
Squaw Valley 1960	Carol HEISS	Figure skating
Innsbruck 1964	Paul ASTE	Bobsleigh
Grenoble 1968	Léo LACROIX	Alpine skiing
Sapporo 1972	Keiichi SUZUKI	Speed skating
Innsbruck 1976	Werner DELLE- KARTH	Bobsleigh
Lake Placid 1980	Eric HEIDEN	Speed skating
Sarajevo 1984	Boran KRIZAJ	Alpine skiing
Calgary 1988	Pierre HARVEY	Nordic skiing
Albertville 1992	Surya BONALY	Figure skating



Lillehammer 1994	Vegard ULVANG	Nordic skiing
Nagano 1998	Kenji OGIWARA	Nordic combined
Salt Lake City 2002	Jim SHEA	Skeleton
Torino 2006	Giogio ROCCA	Alpine skiing

Table D: Officials who have taken the oath

Sapporo 1972	Fumio ASAKI	
Innsbruck 1976	Willy KÖSTINGER	Nordic combined
Lake Placid 1980	Terry MC DERMOTT	Speed skating
Sarajevo 1984	Dragan PEROVIC	Alpine skiing
Calgary 1988	Suzanna MORROW FRANCIS	Figure skating
Albertville 1992	Pierre BORNAT	Alpine skiing
Lillehammer 1994	Kari KARING	Figure skating
Nagano 1998	Junko HIRAMATSU	Figure skating
Salt Lake City 2002	Allen CHURCH	Alpine skiing
Torino 2006	Fabio BANCHETTI	Short-track

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