



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 55 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:

1. Entry by the head of state;
2. Playing of the national anthem;
3. The parade of participants;
4. The symbolic release of pigeons;
5. The head of state declares the Games open
6. Raising the Olympic flag and playing the Olympic anthem;
7. The taking of the Olympic oath by an athlete, an official and a coach;
8. The Olympic flame and the torch relay;
9. The artistic programme.

PROTOCOL ELEMENTS OF THE OPENING CEREMONY:

1. ENTRY BY THE HEAD OF STATE

The head of state of the host country is received at the entrance to the stadium by the IOC President. The IOC President then meets the head of state in the official stand.

2 PLAYING OF THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

After the introduction of the head of state, the national anthem of the host country is then played or sung, as the host nation's flag is hoisted.

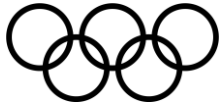
3. THE PARADE OF PARTICIPANTS

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 16 to 88 in 2014 for the Olympic Winter Games. Tradition dictates that 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. Each delegation is led in by its flag and a board displaying its name.

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 when the two Koreas marched together in Sydney in 2000, and again in Athens and Turin.

4. THE SYMBOLIC RELEASE OF PIGEONS

As doves are the symbols of peace, the opening ceremony protocol calls for a symbolic release



of these birds. 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 modified, but not eliminated.

5. THE HEAD OF STATE DECLARES THE GAMES OPEN

First it is the president of the Organising Committee who gives a brief speech from the rostrum. Then the IOC President gives a speech and invites the head of state to proclaim the Games open.

The duty of declaring the Games officially open falls to the head of state of the host country. Royalty and presidents have performed this task, but also their representatives, whether it be a vice-president, a member of the royal family or a governor-general. *See table A.*

6. RAISING THE OLYMPIC FLAG AND PLAYING THE OLYMPIC ANTHEM

After the head of state opens the Games, the Olympic flag, unfurled horizontally, is brought into the stadium. The flag should pass the Stand of Honour upon entry, and then proceed around the stadium. By custom, the flag is carried by eight to ten people. When the flag reaches the base of the flagpole, the Olympic anthem is performed as the flag is raised to the top of the pole. The Olympic flag must be flown for the entire duration of the Games.

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

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, 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 at least one of these colours can be seen on the flag of every nation.

7. THE TAKING OF THE OLYMPIC OATH

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.

Since the Olympic Winter Games Pyeongchang 2018, the three oaths have been merged in one in order to shorten this segment of the Ceremony. Each representative recites their specific line “In the name of the athletes”, “In the name of all judges”, “In the name of all the coaches and officials”. Then the athlete recites on behalf of all three categories: “We promise to take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules and in the spirit of fair play. We all commit ourselves to sport without



doping and cheating. We do this, for the glory of sport, for the honour of our teams and in respect for the Fundamental principles of Olympism.

See *table C*.

8. THE OLYMPIC FLAME AND TORCH RELAY

The Ancient Greeks considered fire to be a divine element, and they kept fires burning constantly in front of their principal temples. This was the case in the sanctuary of Olympia, where the Ancient Olympic Games took place. A flame burned permanently on the altar of the goddess Hestia, and such fires were also lit on the altars of Zeus and Hera, in front of whose temple the Olympic flame is lit today. In ancient times, the flame was lit using the rays of the sun, to ensure its purity, and a skaphia, the ancestor of the parabolic mirror used today to light the Olympic flame.

The flame is carried from Olympia by a relay all the way to its final destination: the Olympic stadium in the host city of the Olympic Games about to begin. The final torchbearer will run a lap of the stadium before the flame is used to light the Olympic cauldron, which remains lit for the duration of the Games and is extinguished only at the closing ceremony of the Games.

Like the messengers who proclaimed the sacred Olympic truce, the runners encourage the whole world to put down their weapons and turn towards the Games. The choice of Olympia as a starting point emphasises the link between the ancient and modern Games, and underlines the profound connection between the two.

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. The ceremonial aspect of the Olympic flame has not always been linked to Olympia, Greece. For instance, for the Olympic Winter Games in 1952, the flame was lit in the hearth of the home of a Norwegian skiing pioneer, Sondre Norheim, in Morgedal.

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 flame should not be extinguished before the end of the closing ceremony.

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 and technological innovations.

On 7 February 2014, the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi adopted a historical theme, portraying Russian achievements such as industrialisation, space exploration and the foundation of St. Petersburg, and celebrating great authors and composers, all seen – in 13 distinct parts – through the eyes and dreams of a young girl named Lyubov (which means “love” in Russian).



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

<i>Chamonix 1924</i>	Gaston VIDAL
<i>St Moritz 1928</i>	President Edmund SCHULTHESS
<i>Lake Placid 1932</i>	Governor Franklin D. ROOSEVELT
<i>Garmisch-Partenkirchen 1936</i>	Chancellor Adolf HITLER
<i>St Moritz 1948</i>	President Enrico CELIO
<i>Oslo 1952</i>	Princess Ragnhild
<i>Cortina d'Ampezzo 1956</i>	President Giovanni GRONCHI
<i>Squaw Valley 1960</i>	Vice-President Richard NIXON
<i>Innsbruck 1964</i>	President Adolf SCHÄRF
<i>Grenoble 1968</i>	President Charles de GAULLE
<i>Sapporo 1972</i>	Emperor HIRO-HITO
<i>Innsbruck 1976</i>	President Rudolf KIRCHSCHLÄGER
<i>Lake Placid 1980</i>	Vice-President Walter MONDALE
<i>Sarajevo 1984</i>	President Mika SPILJAK
<i>Calgary 1988</i>	Governor-General Jeanne SAUVÉ
<i>Albertville 1992</i>	President François MITTERRAND
<i>Lillehammer 1994</i>	King Harald V
<i>Nagano 1998</i>	Emperor AKIHITO
<i>Salt Lake City 2002</i>	President George W. BUSH
<i>Turin 2006</i>	President Carlo Azeglio CIAMPI
<i>Vancouver 2010</i>	Governor-General Michäelle JEAN
<i>Sochi 2014</i>	President Vladimir PUTIN

Table B: The last torchbearers in the Olympic relay

<i>Oslo 1952</i>	Eigil NANSEN grandson of Fridtjof NANSEN, the famous explorer	
<i>Cortina d'Ampezzo 1956</i>	Guido CAROLI	Speed skating
<i>Squaw Valley 1960</i>	Kenneth Charles HENRY	Speed skating
<i>Innsbruck 1964</i>	Joseph RIEDER	Alpine skiing
<i>Grenoble 1968</i>	Alain CALMAT	Figure skating
<i>Sapporo 1972</i>	Hideki TAKADA	Schoolchild
<i>Innsbruck 1976</i>	Christl HAAS and Josef FEISTMANTL Alpine skiing and luge	
<i>Lake Placid 1980</i>	Charles Morgan KERR Team doctor	
<i>Sarajevo 1984</i>	Sanda DUBRAVČIĆ	Figure skating
<i>Calgary 1988</i>	Robyn PERRY	Schoolchild
<i>Albertville 1992</i>	Michel PLATINI Football and François-Cyrille GRANGE Schoolchild	
<i>Lillehammer 1994</i>	Crown Prince Hakon Magnus	
<i>Nagano 1998</i>	Midori ITO	Figure skating
<i>Salt Lake City 2002</i>	1980 US Olympic ice hockey team	
<i>Turin 2006</i>	Stefania BELMONDO	Cross country
<i>Vancouver 2010</i>	- Catriona LE MAY DOAN ¹ - Steve NASH	Speed skating Basketball



	- Nancy GREENE RAINE - Wayne GRETZKY ²	Alpine skiing Ice hockey
<i>Sochi 2014</i>	- Vladimir TRETIAK - Irina RODNINA	Ice hockey Figure skating

Table C: Competitors who have taken the oath

<i>Chamonix 1924</i>	Camille MANDRILLON	Military patrol
<i>St Moritz 1928</i>	Hans EIDENBENZ	Nordic combined
<i>Lake Placid 1932</i>	John Ames SHEA	Speed skating
<i>Garmisch-Partenkirchen 1936</i>	Wilhelm BOGNER	Nordic skiing and combined
<i>St Moritz 1948</i>	Riccardo TORRIANI	Ice hockey
<i>Oslo 1952</i>	Torbjoern FALKANGER	Ski jumping
<i>Cortina d'Ampezzo 1956</i>	Giuliana CHENAL MINUZZO	Alpine skiing
<i>Squaw Valley 1960</i>	Carol HEISS	Figure skating
<i>Innsbruck 1964</i>	Paul ASTE	Bobsleigh
<i>Grenoble 1968</i>	Léo LACROIX	Alpine skiing
<i>Sapporo 1972</i>	Keiichi SUZUKI	Speed skating
<i>Innsbruck 1976</i>	Werner DELLE- KARTH	Bobsleigh
<i>Lake Placid 1980</i>	Eric HEIDEN	Speed skating
<i>Sarajevo 1984</i>	Boran KRIZAJ	Alpine skiing
<i>Calgary 1988</i>	Pierre HARVEY	Nordic skiing
<i>Albertville 1992</i>	Surya BONALY	Figure skating
<i>Lillehammer 1994</i>	Vegard ULVANG	Nordic skiing
<i>Nagano 1998</i>	Kenji OGIWARA	Nordic combined
<i>Salt Lake City 2002</i>	Jim SHEA	Skeleton
<i>Turin 2006</i>	Giorgio ROCCA	Alpine skiing
<i>Vancouver 2010</i>	Hayley WICKENHEISER	Ice hockey
<i>Sochi 2014</i>	Ruslan ZAKHAROV	Short-track

Table D: Officials who have taken the oath

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

¹ Due to a technical problem, Catriona LE MAY DOAN was not able to light her leg of the Olympic cauldron during the Opening Ceremony. She did however return to relight the cauldron during the Closing Ceremony.

² As the Opening Ceremony took place in an indoor stadium, Wayne GRETZKY carried the flame to light the cauldron that burned during the entire Games period located outside in Jack Poole Plaza.



<i>Vancouver 2010</i>	Michel VERRAULT	Short-track speed skating
<i>Sochi 2014</i>	Vyacheslav VEDENIN, Jr.	Cross country skiing

Table E: Coaches who have taken the oath

<i>Sochi 2014</i>	Anastasia POPKOVA	Alpine skiing
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