

The Olympic Games

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(Adapted book. Elementary level)

Chapter 1. Ten seconds

On a summer evening in 2012, eight men took their places at the start of a race in the London Olympic Stadium. It was the 100 metres final, and these men were some of the best, fastest, and most famous athletes in the world. There were runners from Trinidad and Tobago, the USA, Jamaica, and the Netherlands.

Around the world, about two billion people were watching the race on TV. There were about 80,000 people in the stadium that night, and the noise of the crowd was amazing. But the athletes were not thinking about the crowd. They were only thinking about the next ten seconds: ten seconds to win or lose the race; ten seconds to win a gold medal for their country.

Suddenly, it went very quiet in the stadium. Then the athletes heard the start gun, and began to run. Two seconds later, they were moving at 30 kilometres per hour. Justin Gatlin from the USA started very fast, and Yohan Blake and Tyson Gay began well, too. The famous Jamaican runner Usain Bolt was behind them at first, but soon he came nearer and nearer. Halfway through the race, Bolt was going past everybody. He was the tallest of the athletes, and with his long legs, he was soon moving away from the other runners. He finished the race in 9.63 seconds - setting a new Olympic record! Back home in Jamaica, family and friends jumped to their feet, shouting and crying excitedly.

Only the best athletes can ever compete for their country at the Olympics. Most of the athletes finished that August 2012 race in under ten seconds, but they only got to the Olympic final after thousands of hours of hard work.

The Olympics are one of the biggest competitions in world sport. There have been many Olympic Games, and many great athletes have competed in them. But how did the Games start, and when did people

begin to come together for these competitions? If we want to understand the story of the Olympics, then we need to go all the way back in time to Ancient Greece...

Chapter 2. The Ancient Olympics

About 2,800 years ago in Olympia, Ancient Greece, there was a race in a field near the river Alpheus. The athletes ran about 200 metres, and a man called Coroebus, from the Greek city of Elis, won. A crowd of 40,000 people shouted his name and gave him flowers. Coroebus was one of the first Olympic champions.

There are many stories about how the Olympic Games started, and we do not know which ones are true. But we know that the Ancient Greeks loved sport and went to many sports competitions. In or before 776 BCE, the Olympic Games began at Olympia, and happened every four years after that.

They were the biggest and most important of all the Greek competitions, and the kings of Ancient Greece went to Olympia to watch them. The athletes came from many cities in modern Greece, Italy, Turkey, and Africa, and later from cities in Armenia, Egypt, and Spain. At that time, there were many wars in Greece, but because athletes needed to travel to Olympia for the Games, everyone stopped fighting for a month before they started.

The earliest Olympic Games were only one day long, and were built around ceremonies for Zeus - the most important Greek god. There was only one sports event - a race of about 200 metres called the *stade*.

Later, the Olympic Games were three, and then five, days long. There were new races, like the *diaulos* (about 400 metres) and the *dolichos* (1,400 metres or more). By 648 BCE, you could watch fighting, horse- and chariot- racing, jumping, and throwing events at the Games. There was even a shouting event - the winner was the person with the loudest voice!

Perhaps the most difficult ancient Olympic sport was the *pankration*. Pankration athletes had to be very strong. They could not

use their teeth or put their fingers in someone's eyes, but they could fight with their hands and feet, and in any other way. Because of this, the pankration was very dangerous, and athletes sometimes died in these fights.

At these early Olympics, winning athletes were given olive branches, and champions wore these on their heads at the winners' ceremony. Ancient Olympic champions did not win medals, like today's winners, but they often became famous in their home cities, and people gave them presents like money or houses. One of the greatest ancient champions was Leonidas of Rhodes. He won all the foot races at four Olympic Games!

Only men could compete at the Ancient Olympics, and married women could not even watch the Games. But every four years, a different competition took place at Olympia for young women. These games were called the Herean Games, and they began at about the same time as the Olympics. There were races and other events, and the winners became as famous as the men's champions.

The first Olympic stadium was built in the middle of the sixth century BCE., and later there were other buildings, too. The fields of Olympia slowly became a small city. There were stadiums, and also a swimming pool and a gym, and athletes used these when they were training. Most athletes and visitors to the Games slept in the fields around Olympia, but the rich people stayed in a hotel called the Leonidaion. At the centre of Olympia there was also a big building for the god Zeus. On the first day of each Olympics, people lit a flame there and it burned until the end of the Games.

By the second century BCE, Roman soldiers were taking many countries around the Mediterranean - and in 146 BCE, Greece too became a Roman country. After that, athletes began to come to the Games from all over the Roman world. The Romans built new buildings at Olympia, and they changed the Olympic Games a lot, too. Olympic sports became more bloody during these times, and athletes often died in fighting events.

The ancient Olympics went on for nearly 1,200 years. But in 393 CE, Emperor Theodosius, the king of the Romans at that time, stopped the Games because he did not want to celebrate Zeus. Over the years, the buildings at Olympia began to fall down, and people forgot about the city: But they remembered how all wars stopped during the Olympics, and how everybody - the strongest and the best, the richest and the poorest - raced and competed together in front of the crowds.

Chapter 3. A new start

In 1889, nearly 3,000 years after the first Olympic Games, a French thinker and writer called Pierre de Coubertin learned about Ancient Olympia, and had a great idea. Coubertin wanted young people to play more sport - so he decided to organize a modern 'Olympic Games'. Many of the people that Coubertin spoke to about his idea were not interested in it, but at last he found others who wanted to help him.

So in 1894, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) started. The IOC organized the first modern Games in Athens, in 1896, with forty-three different events over ten days. They decided to rebuild the 2000-year-old Panatheniac Stadium as the centre for the modern Olympic Games. Important games took place here during Ancient Greek times - and hundreds of builders now worked to get it ready for the 1896 Olympics.

Today, thousands of athletes from all over the world compete at the Olympics. But at the first modern Games, in 1896, there were only 241 athletes from fourteen countries - and all of them were men. King George I of Greece opened the Games, and the first event was the triple jump - athletes had to jump on one foot, move onto the other foot, and then jump as far as they could. An American called James Connolly won the triple jump and became the first Olympic champion for 1,500 years! The winners of all forty-three events got silver medals and, like the ancient athletes, they also wore olive branches on their heads.

Coubertin wanted to finish these first modern Games with a special Greek event. He remembered the famous story of a Greek soldier

called Pheidippides, who, after the Greeks won an important fight against the Persians at Marathon in 490 BCE, ran 40 kilometres to bring the news to the people of Athens. So for the last event of the 1896 Games there was a 40-kilometre race from Marathon to Athens to celebrate Pheidippides' journey, and Coubertin called this 'the marathon'. When a Greek runner, Spyridon Louis, ran into the Panatheniac Stadium at the end of the marathon and won, about 100,000 people stood and shouted for him. Spyridon Louis was a poor man who usually sold water on the streets of Athens, but that day he met the king of Greece!

The IOC wanted these modern Olympics to take place every four years, like the ancient Olympics, so the second modern Games were in 1900. For these, France was the host country - all the events took place there, in Paris. The Paris Olympics were five months long, and there were some very strange events - in one swimming race, the athletes had to get out of the water and climb over boats! The third modern Games were in 1904 in St Louis, USA, and for the first time, the athletes who came first, second, and third won gold, silver, and bronze medals.

The St Louis Olympics took place over more than four months, while another event called the World's Fair was happening in the city, and they were not very big or important. But the Games soon became shorter, bigger, and much better. Since the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics, all Olympic Games have been about two weeks long. There were other changes in the 1930s, too. After 1932, countries began to build bigger stadiums and 'Olympic villages' with rooms for all the athletes, and in 1936, the Olympics were on television for the first time!

Things have changed a lot since the first modern Games in Athens. Women could not compete in 1896, but today there are women athletes in most events, and in 2012, for the first time, every country at the Olympics had women in their team. There are also now Winter Olympic Games, and Paralympic Games for people with disabilities.

One of the most important ideas behind the Olympics is that sport is for everybody. There are hundreds of exciting events, and millions of

people watch them on TV. The Olympics have become the most amazing two weeks in world sport!

Chapter 4. The Olympics today

Before the 2012 London Olympics, Stratford in east London was not a very interesting place, and had lots of dirty old factories and buildings. The British decided to change Stratford into an amazing new centre for the Games. Thousands of people worked for many years to build a big Olympic stadium and places for swimming, cycling, and other sports.

An Olympic village was built, too, with 16,000 beds for athletes and trainers. It had cinemas, gyms, a swimming pool, and places to meet friends and eat. At the Olympic village restaurant, 5,000 people could eat lunch at the same time! The 2012 Olympics cost Britain about \$14 billion, but the Games were great for the country. Millions of people bought tickets for the many different events, and millions more came to Britain after the Games because they saw the country on TV and wanted to visit it.

The Olympics start in the same way every four years. In the months before each Games, Greek athletes light the Olympic torch in Ancient Olympia, and then people from the host country take the torch across the world, and all around their country, before it arrives at the Olympic stadium for the opening ceremony. In the four months before the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, 14,000 athletes carried the Olympic torch for thousands of kilometres. It went to the Arctic, up the highest mountain in Europe, and under the water in the deepest lake in the world!

Each Olympic Games begins with an opening ceremony, and the four-hour opening ceremony for the 2008 Beijing Games was one of the best in Olympic history. The ceremony began on 08/08/2008 at 08:08:08 - because '8' is a special number in China. It started with music and some amazing dancing: people flew and danced high above the crowds!

Some of the things that take place in the opening ceremony are the same at every Games. Athletes from each country always walk into the stadium behind their national flags. Greece comes first, and then the other countries' teams follow. The athletes from the host country come into the stadium last. Then the host country 'opens' the Games, their national song plays, and athletes fly the Olympic flag. After that, one athlete has to make a promise: they say that they, and everyone at the Games, will compete well and not cheat.

At last, at the end of its long journey around the world, athletes bring the Olympic torch into the stadium. They use the torch to light an Olympic flame, which burns until the end of the Games - just like the flame that burned for Zeus thousands of years before.

There is a medal ceremony for the winners after each event at the Summer Olympics. The winners of silver and bronze stand on both sides of the Olympic champion, and a person from the IOC gives each athlete their medal, and flowers. Then everyone listens to the Olympic champion's national song, and the flags of all three countries fly in the stadium.

A big ceremony ends the Olympic Games. At the closing ceremony for the 2012 Olympics, people gave performances on amazing sculptures of famous London buildings inside the Olympic stadium, and the crowd listened to British singers. They also watched dancers from Brazil, because Rio de Janeiro was the host city of the next Summer Olympics. The athletes danced together and celebrated - it was an amazing party to end a great Olympic Games!

Chapter 5. Sports and champions

On each day of the Games, different events take place all over the Olympic city, and in other places in the host country, too. Some events, like the marathon, only take a few hours, because everyone competes at the same time. But sports like football and basketball take many days because there are lots of games. The best athletes and teams then go on to compete in the final.

All track and field events (running, jumping, and throwing) take place in the stadium - often at the same time. One afternoon at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics, the Czech athlete Emil Zatopek was running in the men's 5,000 metres while his wife, Dana Zatopkova, was competing in the javelin. It was a great day for them, because they both won gold medals!

There are lots of exciting track and field events. The best men's long jumpers can jump more than 8 metres, and in the women's javelin, athletes can throw the javelin more than 70 metres! The pole vault is another exciting sport: athletes can jump more than 5 metres high.

There have been many great Olympic sprinters - like Irena Szewinska, who won six medals for Poland in running races. But one of the most famous sprinters of all is American Carl Lewis. In four Olympic Games, between 1984 and 1996, Lewis won nine gold medals and one silver in athletics events. And he was not just a great sprinter: four of those medals were for the long jump! Carl Lewis's running races were very exciting to watch because he usually came from behind and won the race in the last 20 metres.

Some of the best races at the Olympics take place in the swimming pool. At the Beijing Olympics, swimmers set twenty-five new world records, and the crowd saw some of the most exciting swimming races in Olympic history. American Michael Phelps, who is possibly the best Olympic swimmer of all time, won eight gold medals in Beijing! Phelps competed at his first Olympics in Sydney, in 2000, when he was only fifteen years old. Then, at the next three Olympic Games, he won an amazing eighteen gold medals.

But not all Olympic swimming stars are medal winners: Eric Moussambani from Equatorial Guinea became famous because he only learned to swim eight months before the Sydney Olympics. He did not get into the final for his event, and he swam his race very slowly. But when he finished, everyone in the crowd was shouting for him!

Sports events like wrestling, weightlifting, boxing, and gymnastics happen in different buildings around the Olympic city. Weightlifting is amazing to watch. The weightlifters have to hold very

big heavy metal plates (weights), but the weightlifters are often very small. Turkish-Bulgarian Naim Suleymanoglu was possibly the greatest Olympic weightlifter. He was 1.47 metres tall and weighed only 62 kilograms - but he could hold a weight of 190 kilograms!

Women's boxing only became an Olympic sport in 2012, and Britain's Nicola Adams became the first women's champion. But there have been men's boxing matches since 1904, and many great champions. The American boxing champion Cassius Clay won a gold medal at the

Rome Olympics in 1960. Later, Clay changed his name to Muhammad Ali and became very famous in America, and all around the world. When the 1996 Olympics came to Atlanta, USA, Muhammad Ali lit the Olympic flame.

Gymnastics events are always very exciting, because gymnasts can lose points for very small mistakes. They get points out of ten at their events, but in the past nobody ever got ten. Then a fourteen-year-old girl from Romania called Nadia Comaneci competed at the 1976 Montreal Olympics. She was amazing - she did nothing wrong. For the first time in Olympic history, a gymnast got ten points out of ten - and that happened seven times in Montreal!

Some Olympic sports happen outside, around the Olympic centre. For the Beijing Olympics beach volleyball event, the organizers made a beach in the city centre! The 2012 Olympic triathlon was in London's Hyde Park, and the swimming took place in the park's famous Serpentine Lake. The athletes had to swim 1,500 metres in the cold lake, then cycle 40 kilometres around London, and run a 10,000-metre race!

The men's marathon is always the last athletics event of the Olympics, and thousands of people stand in the streets to watch it. There have been lots of amazing winners, and one of the greatest was the Ethiopian athlete Abebe Bikila.

Abebe Bikila got into the Ethiopian team at the last moment before the Rome Olympic Games in 1960. The team organizers gave him some running shoes, but they were too big, so he ran the Olympic marathon through the streets of Rome without any shoes. When he went

to the front in the last kilometre and won the race, Bikila became the first Ethiopian Olympic champion in history. Before the race, nobody thought that Bikila was going to win, so at the medal ceremony, nobody knew how to play the national song of Ethiopia.

Six weeks before the next Olympics at Tokyo in 1964, Bikila became very ill and went into hospital. But amazingly he got better, ran in the Olympic marathon, and won it. He was the first person to win the Olympic marathon twice. This time, everyone was ready to play his national song!

Chapter 6. The Winter Olympics

In 1924, 258 athletes competed in a ‘Winter Sports Week’ in the mountains of Chamonix, France. It was a small competition, with only a few sports, like ice hockey and figure skating. But it was the start of the Winter Olympic Games, and they took place every four years after that.

The second Winter Olympics were in 1928 in St Moritz, Switzerland, and one of the best athletes of the Games was fifteen-year-old figure skater Sonja Henie, from Norway: After she stopped competing in ice skating events in 1936, she became a Hollywood film star!

The first few Winter Games were small, but they quickly became much bigger, with more than a thousand athletes from 1964. At the amazing 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, about 2,800 athletes competed. The Russians spent over \$50 billion on the Games, which were the most expensive Olympics in history.

Warm weather is a big problem for the Winter Olympics because many of the sports need snow. So the winter before the Sochi Olympics, the Russians put a lot of snow in special places high in the mountains and kept it cold there all year until the Games!

For some Winter Olympic events, like ice hockey and speed skating, the weather is not important because they take place inside. Speed skating is very exciting to watch: it is fast and dangerous, and skaters can go at more than 50 kilometres per hour.

The Dutch speed skater Yvonne van Gennip became a champion in the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics. She hurt her foot two months before the Games, and nobody thought that she could win when she started the 3,000 metres race. But it was the best race of Yvonne's life. She set a new world record and won a gold medal!

Christa Luding was another famous speed skater - but like some other athletes, she also competed at the Summer Olympics! In 1988, she won gold and silver medals for speed skating at the Calgary Winter Olympics in Canada, and a silver medal for cycling at the Summer Games in Seoul, South Korea.

Of course, some of the most famous competitions of the Winter Olympics are the skiing and snowboarding events. People wait for hours in the snow to watch stars like American snowboarding champion Shaun White and Norwegian skier Marit Bjoergen. Many people also remember the great Italian skier Alberto Tomba, who won five medals at three Winter Games.

One of Tomba's best races was the slalom at the 1994 Lillehammer Winter Olympics. Slalom skiers race between flags, and they go down the mountain twice. On Tomba's second time down the mountain, he started in twelfth place. He nearly fell, but then he did better and better and raced his way to a silver medal!

Winter sports can be very dangerous. Some Winter Olympic athletes have died during races and events in the past, and other people have had very lucky escapes. At the 1998 Games in Nagano, Japan, Austrian skier Hermann Maier was racing down a mountain at 130 kilometres per hour when he suddenly hit something and his body flew up 10 metres high. When he hit the ground, people ran to him. They thought that he was dead, but then Maier stood up and walked away. He later won three Olympic medals at the Nagano Games!

Japanese athlete Masahiko Harada became famous at Nagano, too. The Japanese ski jumping team was in first place in the event, but then Harada made the worst jump of his life, which pushed his team down into fourth place. But then on his next jump, he surprised everyone. Harada jumped 137 metres, setting a new Olympic record.

Thanks to Harada's amazing jump, the Japanese team won the gold medal, and Harada became famous in Japan.

One of the most dangerous Winter Olympic sports is bobsleigh racing. Athletes race between walls of ice at 150 kilometres per hour. Most bobsleigh teams are from countries that have cold winters, but amazingly, Jamaica - which never has any snow - has a Winter Olympic bobsleigh team! In 1987, some friends in Jamaica made a bobsleigh and raced it on wheels down hills and streets. That autumn, they went down a real bobsleigh track - on ice - for the first time. The Jamaicans only had a few months to train, but they competed at the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics! The Jamaicans did not win any medals in Calgary, but since then, they have competed in five more Winter Games. There is a film about them, and when they arrived in Sochi, all the athletes wanted to be in a photo with them!

Chapter 7. The Paralympics

Because he fell under a train when he was young, George Eyser only had one leg. But he still became a gymnast. In 1904, the Olympics came to his hometown - St Louis, USA - and Eyser competed in gymnastics and the triathlon. The other athletes in his events did not have disabilities, but he won six Olympic medals, and three of them were gold.

Other athletes with disabilities have also competed at the Olympic Games and won medals. Im Dong-Hyun, from Korea, is visually impaired, and he won two gold medals and one bronze for archery at the Athens, Beijing, and London Olympics. But most athletes with disabilities compete in a different Olympics called the Paralympic Games.

The idea of Olympics for athletes with disabilities first came from a man called Dr Ludwig Guttmann. He was working at Stoke Mandeville Hospital in England at the time of the 1948 London Olympics, and he decided to organize an archery competition for wheelchair users at the hospital. Everyone enjoyed the competition, so

after that, the hospital had a wheelchair sports event every year. In 1952, a team from the Netherlands came to compete in the event, and after that, the competition got bigger and bigger. Then, in 1960, the IOC and Stoke Mandeville Hospital worked together to organize the first Paralympic Games in Rome.

Four hundred athletes from twenty-one countries came to these first Paralympics, and since then, the Games have got a lot bigger. The first few Paralympics were only for wheelchair users, but visually impaired people and people who only have one arm or leg competed for the first time in 1976. The first Winter Paralympics took place that year, too, in Ornskoldsvik, Sweden. Now the Paralympic Games happen immediately after the Summer Olympics, and the Winter Paralympics after the Winter Games - and in the same cities, too. More than 4,000 athletes from 160 countries will compete at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Paralympics.

There are different Paralympic events for athletes with different disabilities, and there are different events for people with the same disability, too. For example, there are races for visually impaired people who can only see a little, and different races for athletes who are blind - who cannot see at all.

When they watch races for visually impaired people, the crowd in the Olympic stadium have to stay quiet, because the runners need to hear well. People who can see run next to the athletes on the track, and the athletes listen to their voices to find their way. Visually impaired athletes in swimming races have help, too, from people who stand next to the swimming pool and make a noise or touch the swimmer's bodies when they need to turn.

The most dangerous Paralympic events are in the Winter Paralympics. When visually impaired skiers race, other people ski with them, talking to them by radio while they go down the mountain at over 100 kilometres per hour!

One of the oldest Paralympic sports is wheelchair basketball, and the matches are fast and exciting. An athlete's Paralympic wheelchair is built specially for their body, and is very fast. An athlete can move at

more than 30 kilometres per hour in a wheelchair, and can turn very quickly.

Very big crowds watch wheelchair basketball. But many people's favourite Paralympic events are the races for runners on blades. Athletes on blades can go as fast as Olympic sprinters, and they often train with runners who do not have disabilities.

There are many disabled athletes who have done amazing things, like Italian Roberto Marson, who, between 1964 and 1976, won twenty-six Paralympic medals in different sports. But perhaps the most famous Paralympic athlete of all time was the American Trischa Zorn.

Trischa Zorn was born blind, but she began to swim when she was seven years old. She became the best swimmer in Paralympic history, and for a long time, nobody could swim faster than her. At the 1988 Paralympics in Seoul, Korea, Zorn won gold medals in all of her ten events! Before she stopped competing, she swam in seven Paralympic Games. She won an amazing fifty-five Paralympic medals, and forty-one of those medals were gold!

Chapter 8. Problems at the Olympics

Eight athletes ran in the final of the men's 100 metres at the 1988 Seoul Olympics. But most of the 90,000 people in the stadium that day were only watching two men: Canadian Ben Johnson and American Carl Lewis. They were the most famous sprinters in the world. Their faces were in the newspapers and on TV all the time. While the runners got ready, people around the world watched and waited. Who was the best?

When Ben Johnson finished first, people all over Canada celebrated. But forty-eight hours later, the IOC said that there were steroids in Ben Johnson's blood, and took away his medal. People can run faster when they take steroids, so this is cheating. Olympic doctors take blood from athletes at each Olympic Games, and if they find steroids in the athlete's blood, the IOC stops them from competing.

Most Olympic athletes compete well, but there have always been some people who try to cheat. After the 2000 Sydney Paralympics, the

winning wheelchair basketball team had to give back their medals because some of the athletes did not have disabilities. Perhaps the Olympics' funniest cheat was American Fred Lorz, who competed in the 1904 St Louis marathon - he travelled 17 kilometres in a car!

Rut cheating is not the only problem in the long history of the Olympics. There was nearly a terrible day at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996, when an American man put a bomb in a park which was at the centre of the Atlanta Games. There were very big crowds in the park at the time. But luckily, a man called Richard Jewell found the bomb and told people to run away. One person still died, but Jewell's quick thinking stopped that day from becoming one of the worst in Olympic history.

In Ancient Greece, all fighting and wars stopped for the Olympics, but this has not happened in modern times. In 1916, 1940, and 1944, there were no Olympic Games because of the First and Second World Wars.

Wars have darkened the Olympics at other times, too, but one of the greatest Olympic stories comes from the 1936 Olympic Games, which were opened by Adolf Hitler in Berlin. Hitler was a racist - he thought that white Germans were the world's best people, and the world's best athletes, and he thought that other people were no good.

At the Berlin Olympics, Hitler wanted white Germans to win many of the events. He wanted the world to think that his ideas were right. But the star of that Games was a black American sprinter and long jumper called Jesse Owens. Jesse Owens won four gold medals in Berlin, and many people who watched his races and jumps knew that Hitler's racist ideas were stupid and wrong. People have not forgotten Jesse Owens: today, near the old Olympic stadium in Berlin, you can walk down Jesse Owens Street.

Chapter 9. Becoming an Olympic hero

Every athlete has a long, hard journey to get to the Olympics. Around the world, thousands of young sportspeople train six days a

week for many hours each day for years and years, because they want to become an Olympic hero.

Some famous Olympic athletes began training in their sports when they were as young as eight. Time is a big problem for many young athletes because it is difficult for them to do school work when they are training every evening. Their families often have to spend a lot of money to help them, and they have to give a lot of their time, too. And sometimes they have to move to another city - because the young athlete needs better training.

Many countries have big training centres for young athletes. There are hundreds of young Japanese athletes at the Ajinomoto National Training Center in Kita, Tokyo. The centre has swimming pools and gyms, and places for many other sports. Doctors and trainers at the centre work together with people who watch how athletes use their bodies and then plan meals for them. Computers look at how well the athletes do, to help them learn from their mistakes and train better. The centre is an amazing place, and it has helped thousands of young athletes.

It is important for young athletes to compete a lot, and to do well in national and international sports competitions. When they get older and better, they begin to travel more and more. They compete all around the world and train for other important international competitions like the Commonwealth Games, the IAAF World Championships, and the Youth Olympic Games.

In 2010, 204 countries sent teams to Singapore for the first ever Youth Olympic Games. Then, in 2012, the first Winter Youth Olympics took place in Innsbruck, Austria. Athletes at the Youth Olympics are fourteen to eighteen years old, and many of them later compete for their country at the Olympic Games.

Of course, not all these young athletes will go on to become Olympic heroes. Some very good young athletes hurt themselves when they train, and others do not do well in competitions. Then, after all those years of hard work, they have to stay at home and watch the Olympics on TV.

For some people, the road to the Games is even more difficult. Australian sprinter Cathy Freeman is an Aboriginal Australian - her family lived in Australia many years before the British arrived there. She came from a poor Aboriginal village, and when she was young, she ran without any shoes. At the time, some white racists in Australia did not like Aboriginal Australians like Cathy, and many people did not want her to race. But Cathy trained hard, and she competed at the 1992 Barcelona and 1996 Atlanta Games, and won a silver medal. Then, in 2000, when the Olympics came to Sydney, Australia, Cathy won a gold medal in the 400 metres. She lit the flame at the opening ceremony, too.

Athletes try very, very hard to win. But the Olympics are not only about winning. At the 2004 Athens Olympics, Brazilian Vanderlei de Lima was in first place in the marathon when a man ran out of the crowd and tried to fight with him. Two athletes went past him, but then someone helped to free de Lima, and he started running again. Everyone shouted for him when he ran into the Panatheniac Stadium and finished in third place.

The Olympics are about helping other people, too. In 1988, Canadian Lawrence Lemieux was in second place in an Olympic sailing race when he saw another boat in trouble. Lemieux lost the race because he stopped to help the people on the boat, but the IOC gave him a Pierre de Coubertin medal. This special medal is for athletes who are a great example to other people, and very few people have ever won it.

Two friends from Japan had a different kind of medal from the Olympic Games, too. At the 1936 Berlin Olympics, Shuhei Nishida and Suetō Oe competed in the pole vault. They each jumped 4.25 metres - the second best in the event. But at that time, the organizers said that they could not both win a silver medal. In the end, Oe took the bronze medal and Nishida took the silver. But when they got back to Japan, the two friends cut their medals in half and put each half together to make new ones. You can see one of these special medals in Waseda, Japan today. It is half-silver, half-bronze - and it tells us what true Olympic heroes are really like.

Chapter 10. Into the future

In 2016, the Olympic Games will come to South America for the first time. They will take place in Rio de Janeiro - one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Many of the events will happen at a big new Olympic Park in the west of Rio, between the mountains and the sea. The Barra da Tijuca Olympic Park will have an Olympic village with rooms for 17,000 athletes and trainers, a big Olympic training centre, and buildings for fifteen different sports.

Other events will happen all around the city, and in other places in Brazil.

The track and field events will be in the Joao Havelange Olympic Stadium in Maracana, Rio, and the beach volleyball matches will take place on Rio's world-famous Copacabana Beach. People will watch football matches in the great Maracana Stadium, and also in Sao Paulo, Belo Horizonte, Salvador, and Brasilia.

In all, Brazil will spend about \$26 billion as the host country for the 2016 Olympic Games. And because Rio is the home of samba dancing and the Carnival - the biggest street party in the world - many people think that the opening ceremony of the 2016 Games will be one of the most amazing in Olympic history.

PyeongChang in South Korea is the host city for the 2018 Winter Olympics, and in 2020 the Summer Games will be in another of the world's greatest cities - Tokyo, Japan.

Each Olympic Games is exciting and different, and the events at the Olympics are changing all the time, too. We do not know what sports will be in the Olympics in fifty or one hundred years' time. But we do know that all around the world, young sportspeople will still have one hope: competing in the Olympic Games - and winning a medal for their country.

- THE END -

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