

JAPAN AND THE OLYMPICS

Asia's first Olympic host



Opening ceremony of the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games

Some 5,500 athletes from 94 countries competed in 20 sports at these games.
(Photo courtesy of Photo Kishimoto)

Introduction

Japan has been an enthusiastic participant in the Olympic Games since the Fifth Olympiad, held in Stockholm, in 1912. Although Tokyo was eagerly promoted as the site for the 1940 Games, they were canceled due to World War II. The hosting of the 1964 Summer Olympics (Tokyo) and the 1972 Winter Olympics (Sapporo) were, respectively, the first summer and winter games ever held in Asia. The 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics marked the third time that Japan has hosted the games.

And the International Olympic Committee has already selected Tokyo as the venue for the Summer Olympics in 2020; making it the fourth time that Japan has acted as host to one or other of the summer or winter games. This is due to the convenience of our transport network and good public safety; facts that are highly appreciated.

The schedule for the second ever “Tokyo Olympics” is July 24 – August 9, 2020, with the Paralympics due to be held from August 25 – September 6 the same year.

History

Under the urging of Kano Jigoro, a *judo* athlete, the Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC) was established in 1911. Two athletes were sent to participate at the Fifth Olympiad in Stockholm the following year. The first two Japanese to participate as members of a Japanese team were Mishima Yahiko, a sprinter, and Kanaguri Shiro, a long-distance runner.

Though the next games were to be held in 1916, they were canceled due to World War I. By the 1920 Games at Antwerp, Japan fielded a team of 15 and earned its first awards: a pair of silver medals in singles and doubles tennis.

At the 1928 Games in Amsterdam, Japan took its first two gold medals, in track and field and swimming. Athlete Hitomi Kinue became the first woman to join a Japanese Olympic contingent. She received a silver medal in the 800-meter running event, and her success encouraged more women to take up competitive sports.

A contingent of 131 members represented Japan at the 1932 Games in Los Angeles, including 16 women. Japanese athletes earned a total of 7 gold, 7 silver, and 4 bronze medals in track and field, swimming, equestrian events, and field hockey.

At the 1936 Games in Berlin, Japan fielded one of the largest teams in its history: 179 athletes, including 17 women. The events were broadcast live via a Nippon Hoso Kyokai (NHK; Japan Broadcasting Corporation) radio linkup, and enthusiastic fans tuned into their radio sets late into the night (because of the time difference between Japan and Europe) to listen to the athletes' progress. At Berlin, swimmer Maehata Hideko became the first Japanese woman to take a gold medal in Olympic competition by winning the 200-meter breaststroke event.

In February 1936, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) designated Tokyo and Sapporo as the venues for the Summer and Winter Games, respectively, to be held in 1940. However, the Tokyo Olympic Games were canceled because of World War II; the London Olympic Games to be held in 1944 were also suspended for the same reason, being realized at last in 1948.

Japan was not invited to participate in the 1948 Games in London, but was readmitted to the International Olympic Committee in 1951, and sent a team of 72 athletes to the 1952 Games in Helsinki. A team of 100 men and 16 women traveled to Melbourne in 1956, and won a total of 19 medals, including 4 golds.

In 1960, Japan organized a large team of 147 men and 20 women to take part in the Rome Olympics. At the closing ceremonies, athletes from the 84 participating countries were reminded that in four years' time, they would be meeting again in Tokyo.

The Tokyo Games and Beyond

In 1952, the postwar military occupation of Japan came to an end, and Japan made a bid to the IOC for Tokyo to host the Seventeenth Olympiad, to be held in 1960. The bid was won by Rome, but Japan was not discouraged. In October 1955, the Tokyo Metropolitan Legislature approved a decision to bid on hosting the Eighteenth Olympiad, to be held in 1964.

A Japanese delegation visited Munich, Germany, for the fifty-fifth meeting of the IOC. Japan had set its hopes on winning the right to host the games and waged an aggressive campaign to wrest votes from rivals Detroit and Vienna. Finally on March 26, 1960, the IOC delegates put the matter to a vote.

For Japan, the hosting of the Eighteenth Olympiad in October 1964 was a historical landmark event that signified the end of the postwar reconstruction period and underscored Japan's high economic growth. During the five years leading up to 1964, preparations for the games literally transformed the face of Tokyo. Roads in the city and suburbs were widened. A huge Olympic Village sprang up in Yoyogi, and NHK built a new broadcast center nearby to cover the event. Total expenditures in preparation for the event were said to be the highest in Olympic history.

But perhaps the greatest showpiece project associated with the Olympics was the Shinkansen bullet train—billed as the world's fastest—which began service between Tokyo and Osaka on October 1, nine days prior to the start of the games.

The Tokyo Games attracted over 5,500 participants from 94 nations. Sixteen national contingents, mainly from developing countries, participated in the Olympics for the first time. The opening ceremony on October 10 recorded an 87.4% television viewer rating.

As host nation, Japan sent the largest team it had ever organized: 296 men and 61 women. Urged on by rousing cheers from their compatriots, Japanese athletes took medals in boxing, gymnastics, wrestling, track

Tani Ryoko

The *judo* wrestler Tani Ryoko won a gold medal at both the 2000 Sydney Olympics and the 2004 Athens Olympics. She also won a bronze medal at the 2008 Beijing Games. (Photo courtesy of Photo Kishimoto)



and field, weightlifting, and shooting. One of the most emotional events of the games was in women's volleyball, where the Japanese team won a hard-fought victory over the Soviet Union to take the gold medal.

Also at the Tokyo Games, a native Japanese sport—*judo*—was included as an Olympic event (men only) for the first time. Japanese athletes took gold medals in all weight classes except the unlimited division, which went to the Netherlands.

The Tokyo Games saw the establishing of 47 new world records and 111 Olympic records. The 16 gold, 5 silver, and 8 bronze medals earned by the Japanese team marked its best Olympic performance in history, placing Japan third in the overall medal standings behind the United States and the Soviet Union.

Japanese Athletes at Summer Olympics

Japanese have excelled in men's *judo* at the Olympics since the 1972 Munich Games too, winning a gold medal in each Olympic competition since then. At the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, Nomura Tadahiro, a *judo* competitor in the men's 60-kilogram weight division, captured his third consecutive gold medal. Japanese men have also taken home the gold in the over-100-kg division (the heaviest division) at two consecutive Olympics, with Suzuki Keiji winning in Athens and Ishii Satoshi at the 2008 Beijing Games. Japanese women have also performed well in *judo* since the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games, where it debuted as an official women's Olympic event. Tani Ryoko took home medals at five straight Olympics, from the Barcelona to the Beijing Games, including the second consecutive gold medal in the 48-kg division that she won in Athens.

The men's Olympic artistic gymnastics team won gold medals at five consecutive Olympic competitions through the 1976 Montreal Olympic Games, and since then the team has won a gold medal in Athens and a silver medal in Beijing. At the Beijing Games, Japanese gymnast Uchimura Kohei won a silver medal in the men's all-around artistic gymnastics individual event.

In the Olympic swimming events, six Japanese swimmers have won the gold medal since the Munich Games. Iwasaki Kyoko won the gold medal in the women's 200-meter breaststroke at the Barcelona Olympic Games when she was 14 years old, making her the youngest gold medalist in the history of the Olympic swimming competition. And Kitajima Kosuke won consecutive gold medals in both the 100-m and 200-m men's breaststroke events at the Athens and the Beijing Games.

In the track and field events, the marathon in particular has been the source of several medals for Japanese athletes. Takahashi Naoko won the women's marathon at the Sydney Olympic Games and Noguchi Mizuki brought home the gold in that event at the Athens Games. In Athletics, Murofushi Koji took the gold medal for the men's hammer throw at the Athens' Olympics, and Asahara Nobuharu and his team won the bronze medal in the men's 400m relay at the Beijing Olympics.

Japanese teams have also brought home gold medals in Olympic ball games, including men's volleyball in Munich, women's volleyball in Montreal, and the softball competition (for women only) in Beijing. The men's soccer team also won a bronze medal at the 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games, where Kamamoto Kunishige was the tournament's top goal scorer.

In other events, Japan won a silver and a bronze medal at the Beijing Olympics in the men's wrestling events, marking the fourteenth consecutive Olympics since the Helsinki Olympics for Japanese wrestlers to take home a medal. In women's wrestling, which has been an official event since the Athens Games, the female wrestlers Yoshida Saori and Icho Kaori won consecutive gold medals at the Athens and Beijing Games in their respective 55-kg and 63-kg divisions. Japanese female wrestlers have won medals in every weight division.

Asada Mao

At the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver, Asada Mao won the silver medal in women's figure skating. (Photo courtesy of Photo Kishimoto)



The Winter Olympics

Japan's first Winter Olympic team took part in the Second Games, held at St. Moritz, Switzerland, in 1928. The first team to be accompanied by a female member was at the 1936 Winter Games in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. Japan has since participated in every one of the Winter Games with the exception of Oslo, in 1948. In 1956, Igaya Chiharu took second place in the slalom event at Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy. It was the first medal taken by Japan in Winter Olympic history.

The city of Sapporo, in Hokkaido, won the bid to host the Eleventh Winter Olympic Games in February 1972. Those games attracted 1,128 athletes from 35 countries. The Sapporo Games also marked the first time a Japanese earned a gold medal in the Winter Olympics, as Kasaya Yukio took first place in the 70-meter ski jump event.

The Nagano Games

The Nagano Games were held from February 7 to 22, 1998. The venues, in addition to the prefectural capital of Nagano city, included famous winter sports resorts, such as Shiga Highlands, Hakuba, Karuizawa, and Nozawa Onsen.

Coinciding with the Winter Games, Nagano also hosted the 107th meeting of the IOC General Assembly.

The Nagano Games were the last Winter Games held in the twentieth century. Seventy-two countries and districts participated, with 2,302 athletes contesting 68 events. The following new official events were included: slalom and half-pipe snowboarding events, women's ice hockey (teams from Canada, the United States, Finland, China, Sweden, and Japan participated), and curling.

One of the stated aims of the Nagano Games was "coexistence with the beauty of nature and its beautiful resources." Consistent

with this goal, new land development was avoided where possible, and various measures were utilized for the recycling of resources.

In the Seventh Winter Paralympic Games held in Nagano from March 5 to 14, immediately following the Olympic Games, 34 events were contested and 580 athletes from 32 countries and districts participated.

Japanese Athletes at the Winter Games

At the Nagano Games, Japanese athletes excelled, with ski jumper Funaki Kazuyoshi winning a gold medal in the large hill event and the Japanese ski-jump team taking gold in the same event.

The 500-meter men's speed skating event has been a showcase for Japanese Olympic athletes. Since the 1984 Sarajevo Winter Olympic Games, Japan has won a total of nine medals in the event, including the gold medal captured by Shimizu Hiroyasu at the Nagano Games, as well as a silver and a bronze medal won, respectively, by Nagashima Keiichiro and Kato Joji at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games.

In the women's figure skating event, Ito Midori won the silver medal at the 1992 Albertville Games and Arakawa Shizuka won the gold medal at the 2006 Torino Games, while at the Vancouver Games Asada Mao won a silver medal in women's figure skating and Takahashi Daisuke won a bronze medal in men's figure skating.

In the Nordic combined event, the Japanese team won consecutive gold medals at the Albertville Games and the 1994 Lillehammer Games, and Kono Takanori won an individual silver medal in that event at the 1994 Games. For women's freestyle mogul skiing, Satoya Tae won a gold medal at the Nagano Games and a bronze medal at the 2002 Salt Lake City Games.

The London Olympic Games

In the London Olympics, Yoshida Saori won a gold medal in women's wrestling, extending her golden streak to three games in a row. In men's individual all-around gymnastics, Uchimura Kohei, a three-time World Cup champion, won a gold medal. While Matsumoto Kaoru won a gold medal in judo, "Nadeshiko Japan" won a silver medal in women's soccer. All in all, Japan won a total of 38, seven gold, 14 silver, and 17 bronze medals.



Uchimura Kohei
Winner of the gold medal in men's all-around gymnastics