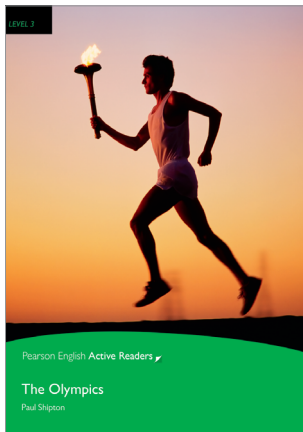


# The Olympics

Paul Shipton



## Summary

The book is divided into twelve chapters and looks at the history of the Olympic Games through the centuries and reveals some interesting facts about each of the Olympic events. The book also touches on the political issues surrounding the Games and some of the less desirable incidents in the Games' history.

**Chapters 1–2:** The Olympics began more than 2,700 years ago in Greece and they were very different from the Games today. For instance, there was only one event, a running race, the athletes were naked, women were not allowed to compete in, or even watch the Games, and the boxing and wrestling fights were extremely violent. Then, in 393 AD, the Games ended and did not resume again for another 1,500 years. In 1863, a man was born who was to have a profound influence on the modern Olympic Games. His name was Pierre de Coubertin. Coubertin wanted athletes from all over the world to compete against each other and he laid down some rules to be followed, some of which are adhered to today. The Olympics are still held every four years and each Olympic Games is held in a different country. The first modern Games were held in Athens in 1896, and all the competitors were men and over half of them Greek. In 1900, women were allowed to take part in several events but were excluded from the running events such as the famous marathon. Although Coubertin wanted the Games to bring people of all nations together, the realities of life meant that the Games were cancelled during the two World Wars.

**Chapters 3–4:** Coubertin insisted that no professional sportsperson should be permitted to compete. However, in the 1970s this began to change and nowadays athletes

are professional. Throughout the twentieth century, more and more women's running events were introduced despite the objections of some who thought they were too demanding for women. Now, women compete in almost all the events, even boxing. Apart from the Summer Olympics there are also the Winter Olympics, which are now held two years after the summer event, and the Paralympics. The Paralympics, introduced in 1960, are for people with disabilities. The athletes use specially adapted wheelchairs and other equipment and can often outperform their able-bodied colleagues. The task of choosing which city will hold the next Games is a difficult one. The organisers have to think about which city offers the best conditions for the athletes and the spectators. Once chosen, the host city needs years to prepare, as they have to construct stadiums, pools and accommodation for the athletes. Hosting the Games can be profitable but it is not always so. At the start of the Games there is an opening ceremony in the main stadium. In Beijing, in 2008, nearly four billion people watched one of the most spectacular ceremonies ever. A tradition, begun in Berlin in 1936, is that a flame is carried from Athens to the host city, and this is used to light the Olympic flame in the main stadium.

**Chapters 5–6:** More and more countries are participating in the Games, resulting in each athlete being associated primarily with the country they are from. National flags are displayed and national anthems played, and close attention is paid to where a country stands in the medal table. The US topped the medals board prior to 1945. Then, other countries started to win medals, especially the Russians. Some countries have wanted to make a political statement by deliberately not sending athletes to the Games. This happened in 1972, when several countries stayed away because they weren't happy with the treatment of black people in South Africa, and in 1980, when several countries didn't attend the Moscow Games because the Russians had just invaded Afghanistan. Tragedy struck at the Games in 1972, when a Palestinian group killed two Israeli athletes and kidnapped some others.

Many athletes have brought their own individual styles to the Games. Dick Fosbury introduced a novel way of high jumping, which was taken up by other competitors, and a Swedish ski jumper placed his skis in the V shape, thereby adding greater height to his jumps. The equipment also changed and improved, especially in the javelin event.

## The Olympics

**Chapters 7–8:** Perhaps the most prestigious of all the races is the fastest: the 100 metres. In 1896, Thomas Burke ran the race in 12 seconds, but since then, times for the race have been getting faster. In 1936, Jesse Owens, ran it in 10.3 seconds, and in 1968 James Hines won in under 10 seconds. There have been many successful women runners as well, such as Fanny Blankers-Koen, who won four gold medals at the age of thirty, and Florence Griffith-Joyner, whose reputation was somewhat tarnished by suggestions that she had taken drugs to run faster. The middle distance races are the 800 metres and 1,500 metres, and the long-distance races are the 5,000 metres, 10,000 metres and the marathon. Many excellent middle and long-distance runners come from Africa, such as the Kenyan, Kip Keino, and the Ethiopian, Abebe Bikila. There are other races in the Olympics apart from running, including bicycle races, boat racing, downhill skiing, skating and of course swimming races. The Romanian swimmer, Johnny Weissmüller, won several gold medals before going to Hollywood to star in the Tarzan films. Mark Spitz won seven gold medals in the 1972 Olympics and Michael Phelps won all seventeen of his races in the Beijing Games in 2008.

**Chapters 9–10:** Not all events require speed. Weightlifting, wrestling and boxing are tests of an athlete's strength and skill, and these sports have seen many changes over the years. Olympic boxers cannot also be professional, although some later go on to be professional, such as the famous Cassius Clay. He later changed his religion and his name to Muhammad Ali. Judges play a crucial role in deciding the outcome of many events, especially gymnastics and ice skating. Russia and Romania have produced some very good gymnasts, the most well known being Olga Corbett, whose smile captivated the audience in Munich, and Nadia Comăneci, who the judges awarded a perfect 10. Sometimes the judges' decisions can be controversial, as in the case of the ice skating event in the 2002 Olympics in Salt Lake City. The American audience thought the American skaters were better than the Russians, but the judges awarded higher points to the Russian pair.

**Chapters 11–12:** An Olympic athlete's life is a hard one, involving hours of training and having to follow special diets. This dedication to their sport, coupled with the urge to win, can also lead some athletes to break the rules of the sport. This can be done in many ways but the most common is drug taking to enhance performance. Tests to detect drugs began in 1968, and in 1988 a test, on the

runner Ben Johnson, revealed he had taken drugs and he was stripped of his gold medal. The use of drugs is widespread and their detection becomes more difficult everyday. On the other hand, throughout the Olympic's history, there have been many instances of bravery, fair play and comradeship. The two runners, John Akhwari and Derek Redmond, suffered incredible pain in their attempts to finish their races, and Robina Muqimyar battled against the prejudices of her native country, to be one of the first women to compete from Afghanistan. When two female runners, one black and one white, ran around the track together after their race, they showed the world what the Olympic message should be.

### Background and themes

**Ambition:** All the athletes mentioned in the book have one thing in common: a powerful desire to succeed and to be the best in their chosen event.

**Fair play:** This was of great importance to the founder of the modern Olympics and the athletes of his time. However, as the Games became more competitive, and the aspect of money was introduced, athletes were often tempted to cheat.

### Discussion Activities

#### Chapters 1–2

##### Before reading

- Write and discuss:** Put the students in small groups and ask them to write down the names of all the sports stars they can think of and what sports they are famous for. Then ask them to discuss the following questions about sports: *Is your country good at any sports? Does your country send any athletes to the Games? Do you think there is too much sport on the television? Do you think sport is really a money business and not really sport at all? Do you think sports stars, such as footballers, get paid too much money?*

##### After reading

- Write and ask:** Write 'Where were the first Olympics held?' on the board and elicit the answer (In Olympia, Greece). Ask students to write other questions about something in Chapters 1–2. Now have students stand up and walk around the classroom, asking and answering each others questions.

#### Chapters 3–4

**While reading** (page 13, after 'Not just for men.')

- Discuss:** Put the students in pairs and ask them to discuss the following questions about male and female roles in society: *Do you think women have*

## The Olympics

*better jobs today than they did in the past? What percentage of the bosses in businesses in your country are women? Do you think there are some jobs only men, or only women, can do? Do men in your country clean the house and do the cooking? Who looks after the children? Do you think women and men are interested in different things, and if so, what things?*

### After reading

- 4 Research:** Ask the students to look for information on the Internet about the 2012 Paralympics in London. Then, they have to give an oral presentation of what they have found out. Tell them to give a brief explanation of the events in these Olympics.

### Chapters 5–6

**While reading** (page 26, after 'The usual body type for this event is tall and thin.')

- 5 Game:** Put the students in pairs and ask them to write down all the words they know in English that are used to describe a person's physical appearance. Tell them they have five minutes to do the exercise. The pair with the longest, correct list wins. Put their words on the board and check all the students know the meanings.

### After reading

- 6 Write and guess:** Write 'The first Asian Olympics were in Beijing, in 1964.' on the board. Elicit which word is wrong from the students (Tokyo, not Beijing). Now students choose a sentence from chapters 5–6 and rewrite it, changing one word. Students walk around the classroom, reading out their sentences and the other students have to identify and correct the mistake.

### Chapters 7–8

**While reading** (page 34, after 'Did she use drugs?' some people thought.)

- 7 Discuss:** Remind the students that drugs are a problem in sport but they are also a problem in general life. Put them in small groups and ask them to talk about the following questions about drugs: *Are drugs a problem in your country? Do young people use drugs? What bad things can happen if people take drugs? How should the law punish people who sell drugs? What can people do to help people who take drugs?*

### After reading

- 8 Pair work:** Write the following words on the board: *destroyed, chest, children, traffic, team, lakes, Tarzan, father*. Ask the students talk and write in pairs to say how these words were used in Chapters 7–8.

### Chapters 9–10

**While reading** (page 45, after 'He started a dive badly and hit his head.')

- 9 Discuss:** Put the students in groups and ask them to discuss the following questions: *Have you, or anyone you know, ever had an accident? If you have where, when and why did it happen? Have you ever seen a bad accident? Have you ever been in hospital? Have you ever broken a bone?*

### After reading

- 10 Write and guess:** Put students in pairs and ask them to choose a short paragraph from Chapters 9–10. Tell them to write it again, making five changes to the words in the text. Students then read out their paragraphs to the other students, who have to identify the mistakes.
- 11 Write:** Ask the students to write a summary of Chapters 9–10. Tell them the summary must be exactly 50 words long, not one more or less. They then read out their stories to the rest of the class who vote for the best summary.

### Chapters 11–12

**While reading** (page 51, after 'But not all the athletes listened.')

- 12 Role play:** Put the students in pairs and tell them they are going to act out an interview between Ben Johnson and a newspaper journalist about his drug taking. See the Discussion activities key for an example start to the conversation.

### After reading

- 13 Game:** Put students in groups of four and tell them they are now going to play the 'twenty questions' game. Student A thinks of a famous sports star. The other students have to ask Student A questions to try and guess the name of the star. Student A can only respond Yes, No or Sometimes. The group can ask up to twenty questions. If they can't guess correctly, Student A wins.
- 14 Quiz:** Divide the students into teams of four. One team plays against another team. Team A writes ten questions about the information given in Chapters 1–6. Team B writes questions about Chapters 7–12. Each team then reads out their questions and the other team writes the answers. The answers are checked and the team with the most correct answers wins.
- 15 Discuss:** Put the students in groups to discuss the following questions about the book: *Did you enjoy the book? Do you think you learnt a lot? What was the most interesting part of the book? Do you normally like reading non-fiction or do you prefer fiction?*