

## JAPAN AND THE OLYMPICS

Asia's first Olympic host



### 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.

### 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

### Opening ceremony of the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games

Some 5,500 athletes from 94 countries competed in 20 sports at these games.  
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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 breast stroke 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

### Judo

Judo became an official Olympic event at the Tokyo Olympics. Shown here is the ceremony at which Inokuma Isao was awarded the gold medal for the *judo* over-93-kilogram weight division.

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### Japanese team

The Japanese team shown entering the stadium at the opening ceremony of the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games.

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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 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.

## 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



**Tani Ryoko**  
Judo champion Tani Ryoko won her second consecutive Olympic gold medal in the 48-kg class in Athens in 2004.  
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**Kitajima Kosuke**  
In the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, swimmer Kitajima Kosuke won gold medals in both the 100- and 200-meter breaststroke events.  
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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 20th 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.

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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.



**Arakawa Shizuka**

At the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino, Italy, Arakawa Shizuka won the gold medal in women's figure skating.  
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