

Olympic traditions are going strong



Tokyo first hosted the Olympics in 1964. Something that has not changed since then is the Olympic symbol: the five rings. In an amazing stunt performed at the 1964 opening ceremony, the Blue Impulse acrobatic team of the Japan Air Self-Defense Force formed smoke rings 3 kilometres above the main stadium. Each ring measured 1.8 km in diameter. [Photo: The Mainichi]

OMAR CHAUDHURI explains some of the traditions you can expect to see at the next Olympics.

The first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens in 1896. Over the last 120 years, the Games have created and developed many traditions and symbols. People like these traditions because many of them are unique to the Olympics, and make the event feel special.

Opening ceremony

This has become a **spectacular** occasion. The opening ceremony also celebrates the wonders of the host nation. Organisers spend millions of dollars on the ceremony because it is a chance to show off the history and traditions of that country.

After this, every competing country enters the stadium in the “parade of nations”. Greece always leads the parade because the Olympics originated in Greece. The host nation is always last. For each country, one athlete gets to hold that country’s flag; this is a big honour.

If we get to see the opening ceremony in Tokyo this year, we can be hopeful that the games will not be too affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The rings

The most famous symbol of the Olympics is the Olympic rings. They represent the five continents of Europe, Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Oceania. The rings also interlock; some people say this symbolises the world coming together. The rings symbol was first created in 1912 for the Stockholm Olympics.

The flame

The idea of a flame came from the ancient Olympics nearly 3,000 years ago — a fire burned during the entire event.

The modern-day flame is lit in Greece just as it was in ancient time, using the sun's rays. The flame is then carried by a torch on a relay across the host country. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, very few spectators are seeing it in Japan this time.

The relay ends at the opening ceremony, where the Olympic **cauldron** is lit. Lighting the cauldron is a big honour. Sometimes, famous athletes like Muhammad Ali have done it, but not always. In 2012, it was seven young athletes who got the London Olympics started.



For more than 100 years, gold, silver and bronze medals have been given out at the Olympics. To help fight the big problem of waste, the Tokyo Games medals are made out of precious metals recycled from old mobile phones and other small electronic devices donated by the public. [Photo: Tokyo Olympics]

Medals

The biggest honour is, of course, winning a medal for one's country. In the very first Olympics, the winner would receive a silver medal and an olive wreath. However, that tradition changed in 1904 when gold, silver, and bronze medals were awarded to the people or teams who came first, second or third in their events.

We are also used to seeing medals being placed around winners' necks. However, this tradition did not start until 1960. Before then, the medal was attached with a pin and ribbon to the athlete's chest. At the medal ceremony, the national anthem of the winning country is played. You will often see the athlete crying with joy at this point — hearing your anthem at the Olympics is an incredible feeling after many years of hard work.



Miraitowa and Someity
[Image: Ryo Taniguchi.]

Mascots

Away from the sport, the host city celebrates the Olympics in many ways. The official poster has become a big part of the Games and is often the image people remember in years to come. The summer games have also had mascots since 1972. In Tokyo, the mascots are called Miraitowa and Someity. Miraitowa combines the Japanese words for “future” and “eternity”, while Someity is named after the cherry blossom, a tree that is famous in Japan.

Motto

One thing that stays the same across all the Olympics is the Latin motto: Citius, Altius, Fortius. In English, this means Faster, Higher,

Stronger. It was created by Pierre de Coubertin, who was also very influential in creating the modern Olympics 120 years ago. What is interesting is that the motto mentions nothing about winning; it is all about trying to do better. Unsurprisingly, Coubertin supported this attitude. He felt the most important thing was not to win, but to take part.

Indeed, very few athletes will experience the joy of winning at the Olympics. In Tokyo, there could be as many as 11,000 athletes, but there will only be around 1,000 medals to be won. However, all the athletes will get a chance to enjoy the traditions of the Games. This is something very few people get to experience. The Olympics is not all about glory and success; it is also about taking part to add to 120 years of remarkable history.

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spectacular (say “spek-tek-kiu-ler”; adjective) = dramatic and eye-catching.

cauldron (say “kol-dren”; noun) = a big metal pot.