

Your Squiz Kids Shortcut to the Modern Olympics

They started wayyy back in 1896, they were the brainchild of a French historian, and today, they're the biggest sporting event in the world. This is your Squiz Kids Shortcut to the Modern Olympic Games - the podcast where we dive into the who, what, where, when, why and how of the big news stories. I'm Christie Kijurina.

And I'm Bryce Corbett.

Bryce, I'm so excited to be talking about the Modern Olympics, today! Have you been watching?

[Snoring]

Bryce. Bryce! Wake up! We're recording a podcast!

Huh? What... Where am I?

Bryce, why are you napping now? I mean... we're meant to be recording a Shortcut all about the Modern Olympics!

Oh...yes, well, I've been staying up late and watching the Olympics as... um research.

Hmmmm. Well, I guess you're not the only one. Billions of people from all over the world are expected to tune in over the coming days to get a taste of the amazingness that is the Modern Olympic Games.

That's right Christie. Thanks to all of the TV cameras beaming the action live from 35 different venues, we can see everything that happens!

I guess you're right, but that's very different from the first Modern Olympics that were held in Athens, Greece, 128 years ago.

Today, we'll be taking you through WHY the Olympics were rekindled, WHO competed in the early Modern Olympic Games and HOW some of the Olympic traditions that we're so familiar with today, came to be. So grab your running shoes, get on your marks, get set and let's go!

Listen carefully, theres' a S'quiz and the end.

As we learned in our last podcast, Bryce, the very first Olympics happened in Greece, wayyy back in ancient times. Then, and historians aren't exactly sure why, they disappeared for about fifteen centuries.

That's a very long time out! So why did they come back?

Great question. A French historian, named Pierre de Coubertin was responsible for getting the show back on the road. And he had a few reasons for wanting to form an International Olympic Games. Firstly he wanted there to be more sport in schools, and thought a major international athletic competition would get more young people involved in physical activity.

"That's some pretty intense PE.

Second, he knew that in Ancient Greece, a truce - a pause in the fighting, a kind of temporary peace - was called during any conflicts in order for the Olympic Games to go ahead. He really liked the idea of a Modern Olympic Games promoting peace."

That's such a great reason! And thirdly, he also thought that athletes from different countries coming together would promote better international relations - that is, that different countries would get along together better.

So, with all of these excellent arguments, Pierre de Coubertin convinced authorities in Greece, the home of the Ancient Olympics, to hold the first Modern Olympic Games. [Fanfare]

Now, hold on a second, Bryce, before you start imagining thousands of athletes from hundreds of countries, remember: this was 1896.

Hmm I guess things might have been a little different 128 years ago. So who, exactly, did take part?

Well, Bryce, just like in the Ancient Olympic Games we spoke about last time, women were still excluded from competing in the early Modern Olympic Games.

What? Really? Get with the program Olympics! So, it really wasn't all that modern, was it?

No, it wasn't. And at this point, all the athletes were from Europe, except for a few Americans. And, more than half of them were Greek. Still, it was the biggest international sports event up to that point, with 240 athletes from 14 different countries competing in just nine sports.

And guess what, Christie? Australia was in the mix right from the start! A 23-year-old accountant from Melbourne named Edwin Flack, who was working in London, decided to take a little detour to Greece to compete. And boy, did he make it count—he won TWO gold medals, in the 800m and 1500m races. He even tried his hand at the marathon and tennis because, why not?

That's right, Bryce! And he kept it a secret from his boss, thinking taking time off to compete in sports wasn't the best idea. How times have changed!

"No kidding!

By the time the second games rolled around in 1900 women were allowed to enter some events, but the first Australian women didn't compete until 1912. "

"That's right! In the 1912 games in Stockholm, Sweden, Aussie swimmer Fanny Durack made a splash by winning the gold medal in the 100 yards freestyle, setting a world record, with Mina Wylie right behind her for the silver.

"

And this year, for the very first time in history, there are an equal number of men and women competing in the Paris Olympic Games, and 55% of the Aussie team are women. Go get 'em ladies.

And speaking of inclusion, Bryce, the first official Paralympic Games for athletes with disabilities weren't held until 1960 in Rome. They were originally started by a doctor after World War II when many soldiers returned home with serious injuries.

Right! When the Olympics were held in London in 1948, Dr. Ludwig Guttmann organised a team of sixteen servicemen and women in wheelchairs to compete in an archery competition during the official games. It was called the Stoke Mandeville Games, named after the hospital, and they were held every year in England. Since 1988 though, the Paralympic Games have always been held in the same place as the Summer Olympics.

Wow, Bryce, we've really covered a lot today!

We have, Christie, but when I think of the Olympics, I think of the five colored rings, the Olympic flame, and of course, those crazy mascots. So how did all those Olympic traditions come to be?

So Bryce, let's dive into some of the coolest Olympic traditions! Starting with the medals. Did you know that the winners at the first modern Olympics in 1896 didn't get gold medals? They got silver ones, along with an olive branch, just like in Ancient Greece. And in the 1900 Olympics, most winners got cups or trophies!

"No way! So when did they start giving out gold, silver, and bronze medals?

"

That happened in 1904. But here's a fun fact—the gold medals are mostly made of silver and just plated with a thin layer of gold. This year, for the Paris 2024 Olympics, the medals are extra special. They're cut into a hexagon shape to represent the shape of France, and each one has a piece of iron from the Eiffel Tower inlaid in it! How cool is that?

Yes, and don't worry, The Eiffel Tower isn't missing a whole lot of iron. The metal was kept when renovations were done over the past few decades.

Phew! And what about the Olympic torch, Bryce?

The torch is another ancient tradition. Back in the Ancient Greek Olympics, a flame was kept burning throughout the Games. This tradition was revived at the Amsterdam 1928 Olympics. Now, the Olympic torch is ignited in Olympia, Greece, using the sun's rays. It then travels all the way to the host city in a massive global relay and is used to light a big cauldron that stays burning for the length of the Games. How the final lighting of the cauldron will be done is always a big secret! One of the most famous lightings was in 1992, in Barcelona, when an archer shot a flaming arrow into the cauldron!

That's definitely one for the history books! Now, let's talk about the Olympic mascots. Ever since a little character on skis appeared at the 1968 Winter Games, mascots have been a fun part of the Olympics. They're designed mostly to market the Games to a younger audience.

And this year's mascots for Paris 2024 are the Phrygian caps. They're named after the traditional French liberty caps, which are symbols of freedom and revolution. These mascots look like little red hats with friendly faces and are full of character. They're even designed to look like they're always on the move, just like the athletes!

That's right, Bryce! The Phrygian caps are a nod to French history and they're super cute. Finally, we come to the Olympic rings—one of the most recognisable symbols in the world. They first appeared in 1913, hand-drawn by Pierre de Coubertin himself at the top of a letter he'd written. He said they represented the meeting of athletes from five continents.

Hold on a second—five continents? But aren't there seven? North America, South America, Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia, and Antarctica.

Great point, Bryce! De Coubertin referred to "the Americas," so North and South America are sharing a ring. And Antarctica doesn't have any permanent human inhabitants, so no athletes from there. Sorry, penguins, no ring for you... even though you are VERY good at swimming.

"Haha, poor penguins!

So, there you have it, folks—as you're watching the Olympic Games over coming days you can tell your friends and family informed about the fascinating history of the Modern Olympic Games... or just send them the link to this podcast!"

This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening...

"Question 1) Where were the first modern Olympic Games held? (Athens)

Question 2) What was the name of the first Aussie to compete in the Olympic Games (Edwin Flack)

Question 3) What is the name of the red cap that the mascots for this year's Paris Olympic Games are based on? (Phrygian Cap)"

Well, that's all we have time for today. Thanks for joining us as we explored the who, what, how, where, when, and why of the Modern Olympic Games. Teachers, there are excellent classroom resources related to this topic on the Squiz Kids website and there's a link to them in the episode notes.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day!

Over and out.