

Your Shortcut to ... The 2026 Commonwealth Games

They started as the British Empire Games...Para athletes compete alongside the rest of the field... and Australia has won more gold medals here than any other nation. This is your Squiz Kids Shortcut to the 2026 Commonwealth Games... the podcast where we explore the who, what, where, when, why, and how of the wonderful world around us. I'm Christie Kijurina."

And I'm Bryce Corbett.

Bryce... I can't help noticing the new tracksuit... Where did that come from?

Christie, please. This is my official team uniform.

Your official team uniform?

Yep. I'm entering the Commonwealth Games.

Bryce... you can't just enter the Commonwealth Games....can you?

Why not? Seventy-four teams are competing. Surely there's room for one more.

But Bryce...you are not a team.

Fine. I'm representing Squiz Kids.

Also, not a country.

The Independent Republic of Bryce?

Definitely not a country.

Well, that's awkward.

Why?

Because I made you a tracksuit too.

You made me a WHAT?

Here you go.

Aww thanks, Bryce... But why does mine say "Assistant"?

Team hierarchy, Christie.

Hmm..

Okay, but Christie... seriously. The Commonwealth has 56 countries...

Correct

...but 74 teams compete at the Commonwealth Games.

Also correct.

Well that doesn't make sense...

And that, is the perfect place to start.

Today, we're unwrapping WHAT the Commonwealth actually is... HOW the Commonwealth Games began and grew into the competition we know today... and WHO will be swimming, sprinting, lifting and rolling their way through Glasgow 2026. So grab your running shoes, your swimming goggles and your lawn bowls...I've got the tracksuits...

And listen carefully. There's a S'Quiz at the end.

WHAT

So, Bryce... you were right that there are 56 countries in the Commonwealth... and 74 teams at the Commonwealth Games.

Which sounds like someone has made a terrible spreadsheet error.

It does. But I think the problem is that we're jumping straight to the Games before answering a much bigger question....What actually IS the Commonwealth?

Well, I always thought it was all the countries Britain used to rule.

And you'd be partly right. The Commonwealth's roots stretch back to the British Empire, when Britain controlled countries and territories all over the world. At its biggest, the British Empire covered around a quarter of the world's land.

Which is enormous. But over time, many of those countries - or British colonies as they were known - decided they didn't want to be rule by a King in Britain anymore - and so they became independent. Some fought for independence. Others negotiated it. And slowly, the British Empire began to disappear.

But some of those newly independent countries still wanted to stay connected and work together. And that's how we eventually got the modern Commonwealth.

A voluntary group of 56 independent countries. And the word independent is important. Britain doesn't run them.

Nope. And neither does Australia, Canada or India. Every Commonwealth country is meant to have an equal voice. Even though they're VERY different sizes.

Very different. India has more than a billion people, while the Pacific island nation of Nauru has only around 10,000. That's like putting one of the world's biggest countries

and a small country with about the population of a country town around the same meeting table.

Pretty much. And altogether, Commonwealth countries are home to around 2.7 billion people. That's almost a third of the world's population. And here's something I didn't realise until we started researching this, Bryce. Not every Commonwealth country was once part of the British Empire.

Yeah, that's right, Christie. Mozambique and Rwanda, for example, were never British colonies, but later chose to join the Commonwealth. So today, it's not just a club for former British colonies. Members agree to work together around shared ideas and goals, including peace, democracy and improving people's lives. But I do have one question.

Go on.

King Charles is Head of the Commonwealth. So... does that mean he's in charge?

No. His role is symbolic. He can't tell the 56 Commonwealth countries what to do. So no royal message saying, "Good morning, Commonwealth. Everyone tidy your desks."

Good to know. Now, can we get to the maths? How do 56 countries turn into 74 teams?

Let's do it. At the Commonwealth Games, some countries and territories compete separately. For example, at the Olympics, athletes from England, Scotland and Wales compete together as part of Team Great Britain, but at the Commonwealth Games, England has its own team. So does Scotland. And Wales. And Northern Ireland competes separately too. Plus a number of territories and islands compete under their own flags. Which is how 56 Commonwealth countries can turn into 74 Commonwealth Games teams.

Spreadsheet mystery solved.

How's the Independent Republic of Bryce feeling?

Strong. Confident. Expanding.

Expanding?

I've declared my desk a territory.

[Laughs]

But Christie... if the Commonwealth grew out of the British Empire, I'm guessing the Games have some British Empire history too? How did they get started?

HOW

Bryce, the original name of the Commonwealth Games gives us a pretty big clue to how they started... They were The British Empire Games.

Ahh... so it started with countries Britain had colonised.

Yep...The first ones were held in Hamilton, Canada, in 1930. Eleven countries sent around 400 athletes to compete in 59 events across just six sports. That is tiny compared to the huge sporting events we're used to today.

It is. And there was no enormous athletes' village either. The male athletes were put up at a local school. About 24 athletes slept in each classroom.

Woah! Imagine trying to prepare for an international sporting competition while someone from the wrestling team is snoring under the blackboard. And, women competed at those first Games too.

They did, but only in swimming and diving. In fact, there were just seven women's events in the entire Games. So the Games have changed a LOT.

They certainly have. And even the name kept changing as the British Empire disappeared and the Commonwealth evolved.

Okay. Hit me.

Firstly The British Empire Games.

Yep.

Then the British Empire and Commonwealth Games.

Bit wordy...

Then the British Commonwealth Games.

Getting warmer...

And finally, from 1978...The Commonwealth Games!

We finally got there!

But one of the biggest changes came when Para sport, competition specifically for people with disabilities, became part of the Games programme. And this is something that makes the Commonwealth Games quite different to the Olympics and Paralympics.

Exactly. At the Olympics, the Olympic Games happen first and the Paralympic Games are held afterwards. But at the Commonwealth Games, Para events are built into the same Games. Same sporting programme. Same crowds. Same medal table.

So if an Australian Para swimmer wins gold, that medal counts exactly the same towards Australia's total. And Glasgow 2026 will have a record 47 Para sport medal events across six sports.

But, Christie... speaking of Glasgow 2026, weren't these Games supposed to be in Australia?

They certainly were. Victoria had agreed to host them, with events spread across regional cities. But in 2023, the Victorian Government suddenly pulled out.

But why?

Money

Ahhh. So now I'm guessing the Commonwealth Games organisers had a rather large problem... Who was going to host in 2026?

Exactly. And eventually, Glasgow in Scotland stepped in. But Glasgow didn't simply pick up Victoria's plans and carry on.

Nope. These Games have been deliberately made much smaller. Ten sports, compared with 19 in Birmingham four years ago. And all the action will be concentrated in just four venues within an eight-mile corridor. So no giant new sporting city being built. Glasgow is using a much more compact model. But that also means some very big Commonwealth Games sports have missed out. No hockey. No rugby sevens. No badminton, diving or cricket either. Which is a pretty big deal if you're an athlete in one of those sports.

It absolutely is. And that's one of the big questions hanging over these Games. Is Glasgow showing the world a smarter, cheaper way to run a huge sporting event...or are the Commonwealth Games simply shrinking?

Good question. But before we tackle that, Christie... ten sports, 74 teams and thousands of athletes. Who should we actually be watching?

WHO

Bryce, for Australian fans, one place to start is exactly where we usually do. The swimming pool.

That's right, Christie. Australia is sending a 60-strong swimming and Para swimming team to Glasgow, with some very big names. Kaylee McKeown, Mollie O'Callaghan, Kyle Chalmers and Cameron McEvoy, just for starters.

And, Bryce, did you know Cam McEvoy still has one Commonwealth Games goal left? He's yet to win his first individual gold medal there.

Exactly. He's a world record holder... but still chasing that particular medal. Then, at the other end of the experience scale, there's 14-year-old Para swimmer Mia Hogan.

14??? Wow!

Yep. She'll compete in visually impaired swimming events.

And I guess that's another reason the Commonwealth Games still matter. For younger athletes, they can be a first taste of a huge international multi-sport event. Big crowds. Athletes from around the world. Living and competing as part of a national team. Basically, a chance to learn how the big Games work.

Exactly! Now, over on the athletics track, Olympic silver medallist Jessica Hull will race the mile and the 5,000 metres. And discus star Matt Denny will try to defend the gold medal he won in Birmingham. But Christie, there's one very fast Australian missing.

I'm going to guess you're talking about Gout Gout!?

Australia's teenage sprint sensation was skipping Glasgow to focus on the World Athletics Under-20 Championships in Oregon.

It starts just three days after the Commonwealth Games finish. So that seems fair.

Gout and his team decided racing at both, plus travelling from Scotland to the United States, wasn't the best choice. And sadly now he's had an injury that will put him out til the end of the year. But, Christie, do you think that means the Commonwealth Games aren't as important anymore?

I think it depends who you ask. For Australia's Diamonds, the Commonwealth Games are one of netball's biggest stages, and they're chasing back-to-back gold.

For Para athletes, Glasgow will have the biggest Para sport programme in Commonwealth Games history.

And for young athletes, it can be a huge stepping stone. A first major Games before, perhaps, an Olympics or Paralympics later on. And for smaller nations and territories, it's a chance to compete on a huge international stage.

So perhaps the question isn't whether the Commonwealth Games should stay exactly the same, maybe it's whether it can keep changing. The Games have changed a lot since 1930, and if they're going to make it to their second century, they may need to keep evolving. I, for one, can't wait to watch.

Well said, Bryce!

Thanks. It's the tracksuit. I really feel like a winner! And on that note, Christie... I believe it's time for the S'Quiz.

THE S'QUIZ

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

1. How many countries are in the Commonwealth? Is it:

- a) 32
- b) 56
- c) 114
- b) 56

2) In which city will this year's Commonwealth Games be held?

Glasgow, Scotland

3) True or false... The Aussie Diamonds are looking to win back to back gold medals in Basketball at this Commonwealth Games?

False - The Diamonds are Australia's netball team

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 2026 Commonwealth Games.

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

Over and out.