

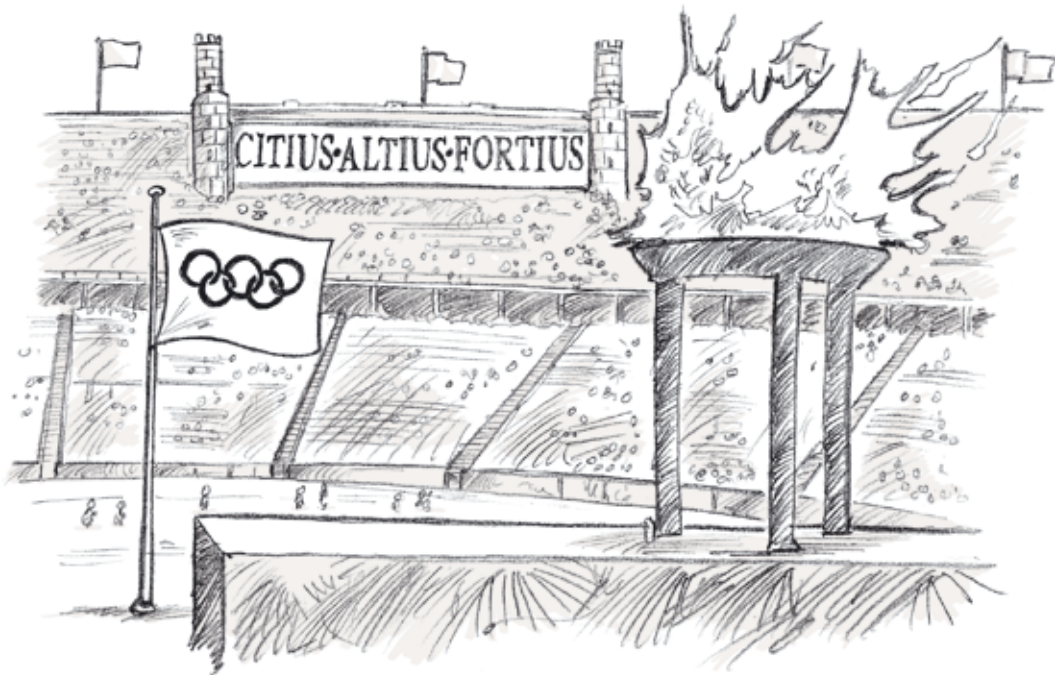
The Olympic symbols

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Introduction

The **meaning** and the **values** of Olympism are conveyed by symbols.
Among these are the **rings**, the **motto** and the **flame**.
These symbols transmit a message in a simple and direct manner.
They give the Games and the Olympic Movement an **identity**.



CLOSE-UP OF THE SYMBOLS IN THE OLYMPIC STADIUM

The rings

The **five rings** represent the **five continents**. They are **interlaced** to show the **universality** of Olympism and the **meeting of the athletes of the world** during the Olympic Games. On the Olympic **flag**, the rings appear on a **white** background. Combined in this way, the **six colours of the flag** (blue, yellow, black, green, red and white) represent **all nations**. It is a misconception, therefore, to believe that each of the colours corresponds to a certain continent.



Pierre de Coubertin, the father of the modern Olympic Games, explains the meaning of the flag :

“The Olympic flag [...] has a white background, with five interlaced rings in the centre: blue, yellow, black, green and red [...]. This design is symbolic; it represents the five continents of the world, united by Olympism, while the six colours are those that appear on all the national flags of the world at the present time.” (1931)

Textes choisis, vol. II, p.470.

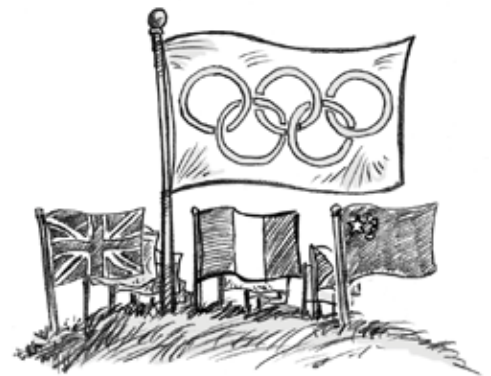
HISTORY

Even though Pierre de Coubertin intended the Olympic Games to be an international event from the time of their re-establishment in 1896 in Athens (Greece), it was only at the **1912 Games in Stockholm** (Sweden) that, for the first time, **the participants came from all five continents**. One year later, in **1913**, the **five rings** appeared at the top of a letter written by Pierre de Coubertin. He drew the rings and coloured them in by hand.

It was also Coubertin who had the idea for the **Olympic flag**. He presented the rings and flag in June **1914 in Paris** at the Olympic Congress.

The First World War prevented the Games from being celebrated in 1916 in Berlin (Germany) as planned. It was not until **1920 in Antwerp** (Belgium) that the flag and its five rings could be seen flying in an **Olympic stadium**.

The universality conveyed by the symbol and the flag was a new idea at the beginning of the 20th century. Nationalism was very strong and tension between certain countries was high. It was in this climate, however, that Coubertin proposed the symbol of the rings which aimed to encourage **world unity**.



USE OF THE SYMBOL

At first, the way the rings were interlaced was sometimes a little odd compared with what we are used to today.



Nowadays, the Olympic symbol is subject to very strict **rules**. Graphic standards have been set down, which determine, for example, the exact position and colour tone of each ring. The use of the Olympic symbol in the creation of an emblem is also strictly regulated and the emblem design must be approved by the IOC.

The Olympic symbol, flag and emblems are the exclusive property of the International Olympic Committee and cannot be used without the IOC's authorisation.

This symbol is among the most widely recognised symbols in the world!



WHAT IS AN OLYMPIC EMBLEM?

It is a design featuring the Olympic rings together with other distinctive elements.

The National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and Organising Committees for the Olympic Games (OCOGs) all have an emblem featuring the Olympic rings.

A KANGAROO AND AN EMU ARE PART OF THE AUSTRALIAN NOC'S EMBLEM

THE EMBLEM OF THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE OF THE VANCOUVER WINTER GAMES IN 2010

The motto

A motto is a phrase which sums up a **life philosophy** or a **code of conduct** to follow.

The Olympic motto is made up of three Latin words :



FASTER — HIGHER — STRONGER

These three words encourage the athlete to **give his or her best** during competition.

To better understand the motto, we can compare it with the Olympic creed :

**The most important thing in life is not the triumph, but the fight ;
the essential thing is not to have won, but to have fought well.**

Together, the Olympic motto and the creed represent an ideal that Coubertin believed in and promoted as an important life lesson that could be gained from participation in sport and the Olympic Games: that giving one's best and striving for **personal excellence** was a worthwhile goal. It is a lesson that can still be applied equally today, not just to athletes but to each one of us.

HISTORY

The three Latin words became the Olympic motto in **1894**, the date of the IOC's creation. Pierre de Coubertin proposed the motto, having borrowed it from his friend **Henri Didon**, a Dominican priest who taught sport close to Paris.

The inspiration for the creed would come later, following a sermon given by the Bishop of Pennsylvania, **Ethelbert Talbot**, during the Games of London in 1908.

The flame

The Olympic flame is one of the best-known features of the Games.

[see sheets "The Olympic flame and torch relay"].

From the moment the flame is lit, a very precise **ritual** is laid down :

– **The lighting**

In memory of the modern Olympic Games' ancient origins, the flame is lit in **Olympia** (Greece) some months before the opening of the Games. The Olympic flame can only be lit by the **sun's rays**.

– **The torch**

A new torch is created for each edition of the Games. Each relay runner carries his or her own torch: it is the flame which is passed from runner to runner and which cannot be extinguished.

– **The relay route**

Carried by relay from Olympia to the host city of the Games, the flame crosses different regions, countries and continents. The passage of the flame announces the upcoming Olympic Games to the inhabitants along the route and allows those following its journey to discover new cultures and customs.



HISTORY

The initial lighting of the flame in Olympia and the first torch relay took place in the lead-up to the **1936** Games in **Berlin** (Germany).



Part of the Games' identity

The symbols associated with the Olympic Movement are now firmly embedded in the **protocol** of the Olympic Games and give rhythm and significance to its most important moments.

The flag has had a varied place in the ceremonial part of the opening and closing ceremonies since **1920**. Initially, it was simply raised in the stadium.

Carrying it into the stadium as part of the ceremony was introduced in **1960** at the Games in **Rome** (Italy). From **1971**, the decision to use **athletes** instead of uniformed cadets to carry the flag has added a special element of surprise to the opening ceremony as many distinguished sports people and individuals have been selected for this honour.

After its arrival, the flag is raised up the flagpole where it remains throughout the entire period of the Games. When the flag is lowered at the closing ceremony, it signals the end of the Games. Today, the tradition of transferring the Olympic flag from the mayor of the host city of the Games to the mayor of **the next host city of the Games** also takes place at the time of the closing ceremony, although this was not always the case.

The **arrival of the Olympic flame** in the stadium by torch relay is another great highlight of the opening ceremony. With the lighting of the cauldron by the last relay runner, the flame is transferred from the torch to the place where it will continue to burn for the entire length of the Games. The flame is extinguished on the final day of the Games at the closing ceremony.

Nowadays, the **Olympic rings** are one of the most easily identifiable visual images in the world, and everyone immediately associates them with the Olympic Games. However, this was not the case at first.

Below are some examples of how the **rings** and **flag** were integrated into the Olympic Games :

– **Winners' medals**

The rings appeared for the first time on the winners' medals at the **1924 Games in Paris** (France). They quickly disappeared from the winners' medals in **1928** when the IOC selected a permanent design that highlighted a seated female representative of victory and a winning athlete, but no Olympic rings. The only exception to the use of this permanent design in the period between 1928 and 1976 was for the Equestrian Games in **1956 in Stockholm** (Sweden) where a distinctive medal that included the rings was created. Since the **1976 Games in Montreal** (Canada) the rings have regularly featured on the winners' medals of the Summer Games, used alone or with the Organising Committee's emblem. In the case of the Olympic Winter Games, the rings have appeared on the medals designed for each edition of the Games since **1928 in St Moritz** (Switzerland).

– **Items and souvenirs**

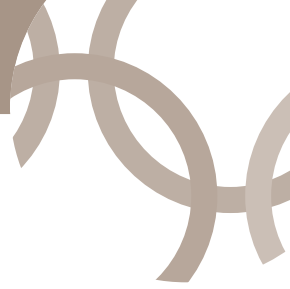
You can find the rings on many items and souvenirs made for the Games dating back to the **1924 Olympic Winter Games in Chamonix** (France).

- **Stamps**

The world of **philately** soon got to know the rings. They have appeared on stamps since the **1928 Games in Amsterdam** (The Netherlands).

- **Official posters**

The poster for the Olympic Winter Games in **St Moritz in 1928** was the first to feature the Olympic flag. For the Summer Games, it was not until the **1932 Games in Los Angeles** (USA) that the Olympic rings appeared on an official poster.



The Olympic values through the symbols

The values of **excellence**, **friendship** and **respect** are the foundation upon which the Olympic Movement brings together sport, culture and education for the betterment of human beings.

The three core values of the Olympic Movement, which are an inspiration both at individual and organisational levels, can be defined as follows :

Excellence

To give one's best, on the field of play or in life. It is not only about winning, but also about participating, making progress against personal goals, striving to be and to do our best in our daily lives.

Friendship

To build a peaceful and better world thanks to sport, through solidarity, team spirit, joy and optimism. To consider sport as a tool for mutual understanding among individuals and people from all over the world, despite the differences.

Respect

To respect oneself, one's body, to respect others, as well as rules and regulations, to respect the environment. In relation to sport, respect stands for fair play and for the fight against doping or any other unethical behaviour.

These three core values are conveyed through the Olympic symbols.

The **motto** embodies **excellence** by encouraging athletes to strive to do their best.

The **flame** symbolises **friendship** between peoples with the torch relay usually travelling through different countries in the world.

The **rings** represents **respect**, bringing all nations and all five continents together without discrimination. The principles shown are universality and humanism.

These symbols are much more than emblems and people should immediately be able to associate them with fundamental values for sport and life in general.

Explore a little further...

Design an emblem for the National Olympic Committee (NOC) of your country. The emblem you draw must feature some characteristics of your country and include the Olympic rings. Then look for the real emblem (on the internet) and compare them!

Create a symbol which, in your opinion, represents peace in the world thanks to sport. Do a drawing, or make a collage or sculpture.

Think of a motto which best sums up your character, or think of a motto for your family, school or club. Explain the meaning of this motto.

Find examples of different rituals (past or present, in your country or elsewhere) performed for certain occasions and draw up a list with a short description. Some examples could be religious ceremonies or the annual celebrations of clubs or schools.

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