Origins of the Modern Olympics

The First Modern Olympics 1896

In 1896 the first Modern Olympics were held. French nobleman and historian Baron Pierre de Coubertin was inspired by the ideals of the Ancient Olympics. The modern Olympic Movement was designed by him to link sport with culture and education. The founders wanted to promote the practice of sport and the joy to be found in effort.

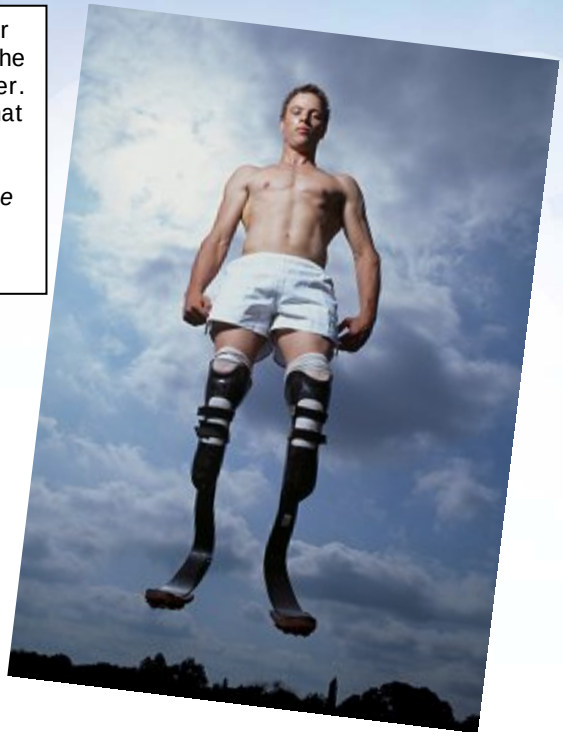
The Olympics would help to build a better world by bringing together people from around the globe to compete to the best of their abilities in the spirit of fair play and friendship. These core values are still at the heart of the Olympic Games today.

The first Olympic Games of the modern era took place in 1896 in Athens, Greece, to commemorate the historical roots of the Olympic Games. That first modern Olympic Games in Athens proved to be a huge success. The stadium filled with people who wanted to watch 211 male athletes from 14 nations compete in 43 Olympic events.

Since this time the Olympics has been held once every 4 years at a different venue around the world, except for 1916 (due to the First World War) and 1940 and 1944 (due to the Second World War).

The Olympic Games are now open to both men and women from all countries of the world.

This is Oscar Pistorius – the Blade Runner. Find out what makes him special in Stage 8 – *the future of athletics*.



The Paralympic Games

The Games are an elite multi-sport event for athletes with a disability. They are a direct *parallel* to the Olympic Games – that's where the name comes from!

The First Paralympic Games 1948 (1960)

In 1948, German-born neurologist Dr Ludwig Guttmann organised a sports event for Second World War veterans with spinal-cord injuries that he was treating at Stoke Mandeville Hospital in Aylesbury, England. He believed sport was an important part of therapy, as it helped build physical strength, stamina and self-respect among disabled soldiers.

Guttmann organised the games to go alongside the London Olympics of 1948. At the first games only British and Commonwealth athletes competed, but it soon grew to include many other nations.

In 1960 the first official Paralympic Games were held in Rome. They followed on immediately after the able bodied Olympics using the same stadia and facilities.

Since then, things have grown and developed. More than 3,800 Paralympians from 136 countries competed in the 2004 Paralympic Games in Athens. In London in 2012, the Paralympic Games will for the first time be under the control of the same Organising Committee as is running the Olympic Summer Games.

Dr. Ludwig Guttmann, founder of the Paralympic Games.

The London Games – 1948

The Olympic Games were first held in London in 1948. 59 nations sent athletes with the United States winning the most medals. Great Britain came twelfth with three gold medals.

Because of their involvement in the Second World War, Germany and Japan – both still occupied by allied forces - were not allowed to send competitors. Although the War was now over, post-war food shortages meant that overseas athletes had to bring their own food. The opening and closing ceremonies, athletic events and the football finals all took place at the old Wembley stadium.