

Olympic Games

According to record books, the very first Olympic Games were held in 776 BC!

History of the Olympic Games

The ancient Olympic Games were held in Olympia, Greece, thousands of years ago. Back then, the Games were held in honour of the god Zeus. The aim of the Games was to show the physical qualities of the athletes who competed and to encourage good relations between cities across Greece.

At first, the ancient Olympic Games lasted just one day, and had just one event – a running race. Over time, the Games were extended and lasted up to five days. Only men were allowed to compete. Women were not even allowed to watch the Games.

Winners at the ancient Games had two victory ceremonies. In the first ceremony, they received a palm branch and had red ribbons tied around their hands and head. At the second ceremony, an olive tree wreath was placed on the winner's head.

According to history books, the ancient Games were banned by Emperor Theodosius, in 393 AD, because he didn't think they were fitting for a Christian empire.



The Ancient Games – Olympic Temple

The modern Olympic Games

A version of the modern Olympic Games originated in Much Wenlock, Shropshire. A local surgeon called William Penny-Brookes believed that physical education and sport should be an important part of the education system.

In 1850, Penny-Brookes organised the first 'Wenlock Olympian Games'. These were a mixture of athletics and traditional country sports such as quoits, football and cricket.

A young French aristocrat called Pierre de Coubertin also believed that sport and physical education could play a very important role in a country's strength and well-being. He decided to visit the Wenlock Olympian Games. He was so inspired that he resolved to create an Olympic Games as an international event, taking inspiration from the Games of Ancient Greece as well.



Flags of competing teams being held by flagbearers during a ceremony

Here is a letter written by Pierre de Coubertin to William Penny-Brookes, which makes it very clear just how much the Wenlock Games Olympian had inspired him:

20th July 1892

My dear Dr. Brookes

You must forgive me if I have not answered your last letter for I am now "swallowed up" by the work I have to do and it is only when I get here at this time of the year that I am able to write a very few letters to a very few friends. You will easily realise what my business is when you know that our union has reached recently the enormous number/members of 62 societies & 7000 members; two years ago we had just 7 societies & 600 members!

The year has been a splendid one all round. Athletics have made enormous progress and our men have improved – enough to be able to win three championships races out of seven at our last international meeting where some of the best English athletes (cyclists & runners) were present.

The season is over now except that we consider the possibility of an eight based match in the Seine in September: the London Rowing Club vs the Cercle de l'aviron de Paris. The only trouble we have is with reference to professionalism as in country towns money prizes are given very often for bicycle races in which our men are sometimes tempted to compete. Of course we don't allow it.

We shall have an eight day festival in Paris from Nov. 20 to Nov. 27 to commemorate the foundations of the union five years ago. Then we are going to have new grounds at Levallois near Paris. Next spring I shall take over to America a French team to compete in New York, Boston and Chicago. It may be we shall play football in England before then –

Remember me if you please to Mrs Brookes and your granddaughter and believe me,

Ever yours very faithfully

Pierre de Coubertin

In 1894, Pierre de Coubertin founded the International Olympic Committee – known today as the IOC – and together they started to organise the first Olympic Games of modern times.

It took them just two years, and in 1896, the first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens, Greece. A total of 241 athletes from 14 countries took part and the winners received a silver medal and an olive branch.

Women and the Olympic Games

The journey towards equality for women in the Olympic Games has been long but steady.

At the first modern Olympic Games, there were still no female competitors. Women couldn't compete until the next Olympic Games in Paris four years later. In 1900, out of a total almost 1,000 athletes, only 22 were women.

Four years later, at the Los Angeles 1904 Olympic Games, just 13% of the athletes were women. By the Tokyo 1964 Olympic Games, the number had increased to 23% – and to 45% in the Rio 2016 Olympic Games.



London 2012 women's Rowing



London 2012 Referee Veronika Szucs (C) announces Nicola Adams (L) of Great Britain winner against Cancan Ren (R) of China during the Women's Fly (51kg) Boxing final

With the inclusion of Women's Boxing in the London 2012 Olympic Games, women competed in every sport on the Olympic programme for the first time.

Wojdan Shahrkhani, aged 16, became the first Saudi Arabian woman to compete at the Olympic Games when she took part in the +78kg judo competition in London 2012.

The Olympic Games

The Games today are much larger than they used to be, and they last much longer – at the London 2012 Olympic Games, they lasted 17 days and athletes competed in 26 different sports.

In Ancient Greece, the Government and wealthy, famous Greek citizens paid for the Games. Today, the Games are more expensive to deliver and have large sponsors or companies that pay to be associated with the Games. This helps to fund the cost of the Games.

Since 1968, the Olympic Games have been followed by a Paralympic Games, for disabled athletes.



Alpine skiing at the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic Games

The Olympic Winter Games

When the modern Olympic Games first started, only summer sports were included. In the 1920s, snow and ice sports became popular and so, in 1924, the International Olympic Committee decided to hold the first Olympic Winter Games in Chamonix, France. The Games were popular, with 258 athletes from 16 countries taking part.

Now the Olympic Winter Games happen every four years in locations all over the world, from Vancouver, Canada (2010) and Sochi, Russia (2014) to PyeongChang, South Korea (2018) and Beijing, China (2022). The number of participants also keeps growing. At the Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games, around 2,780 athletes from 88 nations took part.

Marking great Olympic moments



Host City Beijing hands over the Olympic Flag to the Mayor of London Boris Johnson

The first big event for the London 2012 Olympic Games was the Handover Ceremony, which happened during the Closing Ceremony of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games and marked the moment that London officially became the next Host City.

Handover Ceremony

At the beginning of the Handover, the Olympic Flag is taken down in the stadium and passed to the Mayor of the next Host City. The new Host City then puts on a cultural performance, which is designed to show the world the culture of the next Host Nation and how exciting the next Games will be.



Olympic Rings during the London 2012 Olympic Opening Ceremony

The Opening and Closing Ceremonies

These ceremonies traditionally mark the start and end of the Olympic Games.

For London 2012, Danny Boyle produced a brilliant Opening Ceremony called 'Isles of Wonder'. It began with Bradley Wiggins, 2012 Tour de France Champion and Olympic Gold medallist, ringing the largest harmonically tuned bell in the world. The show featured one of the largest sets ever built to represent the British countryside, and included everything from the Industrial Revolution and British popular music through to the Queen meeting James Bond! 10,000 volunteers took part in the performance.



The London 2012 Olympic Cauldron burning brightly

The ceremony ended with the lighting of the Cauldron by seven young athletes, chosen by seven British Olympic Gold medallists.

During the Closing Ceremony, anthems are played, the Flag is passed to the mayor of the next Host City and the Flame is put out. Then the party begins – with athletes, spectators and officials celebrating the end of a successful Games. The Closing Ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic Games was called 'A Symphony of British Music' and featured more than 4,100 performers.

Medal Ceremonies

Standing on the podium representing their country and being presented with a medal is every Olympic athlete's dream – and the reward for years of hard training and determination.

Although medal design is unique to each Olympic Games, they share a common history and traditions:

- The Olympic medals' circular form is a metaphor for the world. The front of the medal always depicts the same imagery at the summer Games – the Greek goddess of victory, Nike, stepping out of the depiction of the Parthenon to arrive in the Host City.

Designed by David Watkins, an established artist in the field of decorative art, and produced at the Royal Mint headquarters in Llantrisant, South Wales,

the design for the reverse side of the London 2012 Olympic medals features five symbolic elements:

- The curved background implies a bowl, similar to the design of an amphitheatre.
- The core emblem/logo is an architectural expression, a metaphor for the modern city, and is deliberately jewel-like.
- The grid suggests both a pulling together and a sense of outreach – an image of radiating energy that represents the athletes' efforts.
- The River Thames in the background is a symbol for London and also suggests a fluttering baroque ribbon, adding a sense of celebration.
- The square is the final balancing motif of the design, emphasising its focus on the centre and reinforcing the sense of 'place' as in a map inset.

Medal dimensions

The London 2012 Olympic medals weigh 375–400g, are 85mm in diameter and 7mm thick.

- The gold medal is made up of 92.5% silver and 1.34% gold, with the remainder copper (a minimum of 6g of gold).
- The silver medal is made up of 92.5% silver, with the remainder copper.
- The bronze medal is made up of 97.0% copper, 2.5% zinc and 0.5% tin.



Mo Farah and Usain Bolt receive their medals at the London 2012 Olympic Games



The London 2012 Medals

The Olympic Torch Relay



Lighting the Olympic torch in Greece

The Olympic Torch Relay brings the excitement of the Games to the heart of those communities that together make up the Host Nation. It is a clear and celebratory signal that the Olympic Games are imminent.

The Olympic Torch contains the Olympic Flame, which is always lit from the rays of the sun in Olympia, Greece, the birthplace of the ancient Olympic Games. After a five-day relay around Greece, organised by the Hellenic (Greek) Olympic Committee, the Flame is handed over in a special ceremony to the organisers of the Games themselves. It then begins its journey to the Olympic Stadium – spreading the message of peace, unity and friendship.

How does the Flame travel between countries – and stay alight?

The answer to that is just about any mode of transport you can think of! Over the years, planes, trains, trams and boats have transported the Flame, in addition to it being carried on shorter



London 1948 Olympic Cauldron

journeys by swimmers, cyclists and walkers. During the longer journeys, e.g. by plane, the Flame is kept in a transportation lantern for safety.

For the London 2012 Olympic Torch Relay, the Flame was kept alight by gas – a mixture of two-thirds propane and one-third butane. It worked in temperatures between -5 and 40 degrees C, as well as in 95% humidity, rain, snow and winds of up to 50mph. It was even taken up Mount Snowdon, and the Flame did not go out!

Overnight, the Flame is kept in a lantern, and watched over by security guards.

During the Torch Relay, the Flame is passed from Torch to Torch – one Torchbearer will put their Torch near that of the next Torchbearer, and the fuel in each Torch will allow the Flame to pass from one to the other. This moment is called 'the kiss'.

A 'mother flame' is always kept safe in a lantern, along the Torch Relay, in case the Torch does go out.

The Torchbearers

It is considered a great honour to carry the Flame in an Olympic Torch Relay. 'Torchbearers' are usually chosen because they have done or achieved something truly inspirational, such as overcoming a personal trauma, giving selflessly to the community as a volunteer or for feats of outstanding courage, or because they are celebrities.

For the London 2012 Torch Relay, 8,000 Torchbearers – the youngest of whom was 12 and the oldest 99 – carried the Flame on one leg of its 70-day journey around the whole of the UK.

The moment the Torch enters the Olympic Stadium is the highlight of every Opening Ceremony. Usually at each Games, one person is chosen to be the final Torchbearer. The final Torchbearer does a lap of the Stadium and then uses the Flame to light the Cauldron. The Flame stays lit until the Closing Ceremony.

At the London 2012 Olympic Games, the lighting of the Cauldron was different – and totally unexpected. The Flame arrived via the Thames on a speedboat with David Beckham on board. He handed the Flame to Sir Steve Redgrave, Olympic multi medallist.

The honour of lighting the Cauldron was then given to seven aspiring young athletes, each nominated by seven great British Olympians (including Sir Steve Redgrave). They each lit a single petal which ignited 204 petals in total, one for each competing nation at the Olympic Games. Long stems then rose towards each other in unison to form the Cauldron.



London 2012 Olympic Torch Kiss



London 2012 Young Torchbearer Henry Hocking

Amazing facts about the Olympic Games

Amazing facts about the ancient Olympic Games

- The ancient Olympic Games took place in Olympia, Greece over 2,000 years ago.
- The first ever Games only had one event – a race on foot.
- Back then, all athletes competed in the nude!
- As the ancient Games grew, Greek men came from every part of the country to take part in sports like wrestling, running, boxing and chariot racing.
- The athletes were fed on foods like cheese and fruit in the thirty days leading up to the Games.
- All the athletes in the ancient Olympic Games were men. The only women allowed to watch the Games were the priestesses.
- Some women were so keen to see the Games, they dressed up as men and sneaked in!
- From the seventh ancient Olympic Games onwards, the prize was a wreath made from the branches of olive trees.

- According to history books, the ancient Games were banned by Emperor Theodosius in 393AD, because he didn't think they were fitting for a Christian empire.

Amazing facts about the modern Olympic Games

- In the 1890s, more than 1,500 years after the ancient Olympic Games were banned, a French man called Pierre de Coubertin had a vision that sport could be used to help make the world a better place. It was his inspiration that led to the Olympic Games starting again. He believed that the Olympic Games should be about bringing sport, culture and education together.
- In 1894, he founded the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and together they started to organise the first Olympic Games of modern times.
- Two years later, in 1896, the first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens, Greece. A total of 241 athletes from 14 countries took part and the winners received a silver medal and an olive branch.



An Ancient Games Victory Ceremony



The London 1908 Olympic Stadium

- Athletes marched into the stadium during the Opening Ceremony for the first time at the London 1908 Olympic Games.
- The Olympic Flame returned as a feature of the modern Games at the Amsterdam 1928 Olympic Games.
- Before each Olympic Games, the Flame is lit at the ancient site of Olympia by capturing the sun's rays through a curved mirror.
- The Flame then passes in a Torch Relay from Greece to the stadium of the Host City.
- The Greek Team always leads the Athletes' Parade at the Opening Ceremony. The Host Nation enters the stadium last.
- Women competed in track and field events for the first time at the Amsterdam 1928 Games. But so many of the women collapsed at the end of the 800 metre race that the event was banned and not reintroduced until 1960.
- At the London 2012 Games, women were part of all competing nations' teams for the first time ever.
- Women's Boxing was included at the Olympic Games for the first time during the London 2012 Games; Team GB's Nicola Adams won the Gold medal to become the first ever Women's Boxing Olympic Champion.
- There were 26 sports at the London 2012 Olympic Games with athletes representing 204 different countries.
- Team GB won an amazing 65 medals in the London 2012 Olympic Games and were third in the medal table.



Carrying the torch through Westminster

- In 1956, the summer Games were held in late November. Why? Because the venue was Melbourne, Australia, and that's when it's summer in the Southern Hemisphere.
- The last medal at the first winter Games in 1924 was awarded 50 years later. In 1974, a scoring error was noticed in the ski jumping event, and the Bronze medal was given to the American Anders Haugen, who had originally been fourth.
- Walt Disney was the head of the committee which organised the Opening Ceremony for the 1960 winter Games in Squaw Valley, California.
- Two winter sports were originally played at the summer Games: figure skating in 1908 and 1920, and ice hockey in 1920.



Figure Skating at the Vancouver Winter Olympic Games 2010

The history of the Paralympic Games

Spirit in motion

During the Second World War, thousands of active service personnel received devastating injuries but somehow survived. Survivors of catastrophic spinal injuries were often taken to Stoke Mandeville Hospital in Buckinghamshire.

During and after the war, hospital resources were precious and specialist neurological expertise was still relatively rare. Patients at Stoke Mandeville were cared for as well as possible given these constraints, but little was known at the time about how to rehabilitate people with serious spinal injuries.

Attitudes towards disability were also very different then, and some questioned the sense of expending valuable resources on patients who had no hope of ever living a 'normal' life or contributing to society. As HRH Prince Charles said, 'It is amazing to think that not many years ago, the treatment of paraplegics was generally considered a waste of time.'

In 1944, a German neurologist arrived at Stoke Mandeville Hospital. Ludwig Guttmann was in many ways a man ahead of his times. He could see that it was not only his patients' bodies that had been traumatised – so too had their minds and spirits. He could see that what they lacked was hope.

Guttmann set about introducing pioneering rehabilitation treatments and programmes. He believed that physical activity and sport would not only help his patients to feel better, become stronger and more independent, but it would also increase their confidence and give them something to aim for.

On 28 July 1948, Guttmann organised an archery competition at Stoke Mandeville Hospital with 14 men and two women competing. The first Paralympic Games was born – and with it the beginnings of more positive attitudes towards disability.

The 'Stoke Mandeville Games' as they became known, grew steadily. Guttmann said in 1949, 'I foresaw a time when this sports event would be truly international and the Stoke Mandeville Games would achieve world fame as the disabled person's equivalent of the Olympic Games.'

Mandeville, the London 2012 Paralympic mascot, was named after Stoke Mandeville where Guttmann carried out his pioneering work.

At the London 2012 Paralympic Games, over 4,000 Paralympic athletes from 160 nations took part in 20 sports. ParalympicsGB won an astonishing 120 medals.



Stoke Mandeville Games – Basketball

The Paralympic Games

The Ceremonies



Scouts, as they ascended Slieve Donard for the Paralympic Flame Lighting Ceremony

London 2012 Paralympic Flame Lighting Ceremony

For London 2012, four groups of disabled and non-disabled Scouts and mountaineers climbed the highest peaks of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to light the Paralympic Flame. They used the traditional technique of rubbing flints together to kindle sparks.

The Opening Ceremony

The Opening Ceremony is one of the major highlights of the Paralympic Games and is designed to inspire and excite the audience as the Games really take off.

The London 2012 Opening Ceremony took 'enlightenment' as its theme, and with Stephen Hawking narrating, it took the audience on a journey of discovery through the realm of ideas, science and creativity. The performance featured deaf and disabled performers as well as more than 3,000 volunteers.

The Closing Ceremony

The Closing Ceremony marks the end of the Paralympic Games and is a time of celebration. As well as music, dancing and fireworks, the Closing Ceremony includes

the taking down and handing over of the Paralympic Flag to the Mayor of the next Host City. At the end of the Closing Ceremony, the Flame is put out. Then the party begins!

Honouring Britain's ancient traditions, the London 2012 Closing Ceremony was called 'The Festival of the Flame'. UK band Coldplay led the show with a live set reflecting the four seasons.



Pyrotechnics burn during the Closing Ceremony

Medal Ceremonies

A medal ceremony takes place soon after a sports event finishes. Being one of the three medallists on the podium is every Paralympian's dream, and the recognition and reward for years of dedicated hard work, grit and determination.

During the medal ceremonies, the flags of the three winning athletes' countries are raised and the national anthem of the Gold medallist's nation is played.



The medal ceremony for the Men's 200m – T42

The London 2012 Paralympic Medals

The medal designs are different for each of the Games. They have to be at least 60mm in diameter and 3mm thick.

The London 2012 Paralympic Games medals were designed by Lin Cheung, a practising jewellery artist, and were produced at the Royal Mint headquarters in Llantrisant, South Wales.

- The gold medal is made up of 92.5% silver, 1.34% gold with the remainder copper (a minimum of 6g of gold).
- The silver medal is made up of 92.5% silver with the remainder copper.
- The bronze medal is made up of 97% copper, 2.5% zinc and 0.5% tin.

The Story behind the Medals

One side of the medal represents 'Spirit in motion', the Paralympic Motto, and features a close-up section of an outstretched wing of the Greek goddess of victory. This image represents forward flight, power and lightness, a metaphor for the spirit of the Paralympic Games.

The reverse of the medal represents 'The heart of victory' symbolising inclusion and togetherness. It incorporates a direct mould from the heart area of the plaster cast of 'The Nike of Paionios', the Greek goddess of victory, residing in the British Museum Cast Collection.

In the London 2012 Paralympic Games, ParalympicsGB won 120 medals.



The London 2012 Paralympic medals

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The Paralympic Torch Relay

The Paralympic Torch Relay celebrates the power of human endeavour and energy in the run up to the Paralympic Games. It brings the excitement of the Games to the heart of those communities that together make up the Host Nation. It is a clear and celebratory signal that the Paralympic Games are imminent.

The Paralympic Torch

The London 2012 Paralympic Torch was created to represent modernity and innovation. Its mirrored finish not only reflected the light of the Flame and the Torchbearers that carried it, but also reflected the communities it travelled through – its colour adapted to its surroundings and to different light.

Made from an aluminium alloy, this Paralympic Torch was light yet strong. Thousands of round perforations across its surface gave it a texture that is easy to grip, but also allowed people to see into the heart of the Flame within it.



The London 2012 Paralympic Torch



The London 2012 Paralympic Torch Relay in front of an aquarium

How does the Flame stay alight?

For the London 2012 Paralympic Torch Relay, the Flame was kept alight by gas – a mixture of two-thirds propane and one-third butane. It worked in temperatures between -5 and 40 degrees C, as well as in 95% humidity, rain, snow and winds of up to 50mph.

Overnight, the Flame is kept in a lantern, and watched over by security guards.

During the Torch Relay, the Flame is passed from Torch to Torch – one Torchbearer will put their Torch near that of the next Torchbearer, and the fuel in each Torch will allow the Flame to pass from one to the other. This moment is called 'the kiss'.

A 'mother flame' is always kept safe in a lantern, along the Torch Relay, in case the Torch does go out.



Passing the Paralympic Flame – the kiss

London 2012 Paralympic Torch Relay

At dawn on Wednesday 22 August, four groups of disabled and non-disabled Scouts and mountaineers climbed the highest peaks of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and used the traditional technique of rubbing flint to create sparks to kindle a flame.

Chair of London 2012 Organising Committee Seb Coe said, 'By creating the four Flames through human endeavour at the four highest peaks in the UK, we will ensure that the spirit of each home nation is represented in the Paralympic Flame.'

The Flames were then transferred to each nation's capital city where they became the focus for a day of Paralympic celebrations.

On Tuesday 28 August, the four Flames were united in Stoke Mandeville, Buckinghamshire – the spiritual home of the Paralympic Movement – to create the London 2012 Paralympic Flame.

24-hour Torch Relay

At the end of the Flame Lighting ceremony in Stoke Mandeville, 580 inspirational Torchbearers, working in teams of five, took part in a 24-hour Torch Relay carrying the Paralympic Flame 92 miles to the Olympic Stadium, ready for the Opening Ceremony.



Lighting the Paralympic Cauldron at the evening celebration site in Belfast City Hall

The symbols of the Paralympic Games

The Paralympic Flag and the Agitos

The Paralympic Flag is raised at the Opening Ceremony of each Games and lowered at the Closing Ceremony. The 1964 Tokyo Games were the first to have a separate Paralympic Flag.

The Paralympic Flag displays the Agitos. The Agitos is a powerful and highly recognised symbol of the Paralympic Games, and is recognised all over the world. The three Agitos (Latin for 'I move') – coloured red, blue and green – encircle a centre point, showing that the Paralympic Games bring athletes together from around the globe, and that athletes are always moving forward and never give up.

Five days before the start of the London 2012 Paralympic Games, an image of the Agitos was suspended from Tower Bridge in London. The Agitos began to appear in other famous London locations including Trafalgar Square and Kew Gardens, and in other cities around the UK including Cardiff and Edinburgh.



The Agitos

The Paralympic Motto

The Paralympic Motto is 'Spirit in Motion', first introduced in 2004 at the Paralympic Games in Athens. The previous Motto, introduced in 1994, was 'Mind, Body, Spirit'.

The London 2012 Paralympic Torch

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The Paralympic Torch

The Paralympic Mascot

There is a Mascot for every Paralympic Games. Inspired by Stoke Mandeville in Buckinghamshire, the birthplace of the Paralympic Games, the official Mascot for London 2012, Mandeville, was created from drops of steel left over from the construction of the Olympic Stadium.



The Paralympic Anthem

The Paralympic Anthem, also known as the Paralympic Hymn, is played when the Paralympic Flag is raised. It is a musical piece, 'Hymn de l'Avenir' – 'Anthem of the Future' – composed by Thierry Darnis.

The anthem was approved by the International Paralympic Committee in March 1996. An Australian country singer, Graeme Connors, wrote the lyrics for the anthem in 2001.

Disability sport and technology

Technology at the Paralympic Games has come a long way since the first Wheelchair Games in Stoke Mandeville in 1948. For many disabled athletes, specialist equipment – like running blades and super light wheelchairs – has revolutionised their ability to compete in high-performance sport.

Paralympians show their speed, strength, power and stamina during the athletics competition, which is the largest sport at the Paralympic Games. Depending upon their impairment, some athletes compete in wheelchairs or throwing frames, others with the guidance of a sighted companion. Some runners use a carbon fibre running blade, while swimmers use blacked out goggles.



Wheelchair Racing at the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games and Wheelchair Basketball at the Stoke Mandeville Wheelchair Games in 1948.

Wheelchair technology

From the 1980s, lighter-weight metals and materials such as carbon fibre were used to construct wheelchairs. After 1988, changes to the Paralympic rules meant that more aerodynamic three-wheeled chairs with steering and quick pivoting could be used. Today, there are special chairs for different sports, for example, Wheelchair Racing, Wheelchair Tennis and Wheelchair Rugby which is so demanding and physical that it has been nicknamed 'Murderball'.

Running blades

Carbon fibre running blades were first used by athletes at the Seoul 1988 Paralympic Games. The running blades are designed to transfer the speed and energy created by the athlete onto the track.

Running only uses the front part of the foot (the ball), so the carbon fibre blades are designed to reproduce the



Richard Whitehead at the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games

function of just the forefoot and have no heel. Spikes, which grip the track, are fitted to the running blade.

Carbon fibre is about five times as strong as steel, yet it's stiffer and much lighter. It is made up of very thin strands of carbon – even thinner than human hair – twisted together and woven like cloth to make a carbon fibre layer. Each carbon fibre blade is made up of more than 50 layers of carbon. Each one is laid by hand and it takes one person two hours to lay the carbon for a single spring.

Richard Whitehead MBE was the Paralympic champion in the T42 200m at both London 2012 and Rio 2016. He has consistently lowered the world record time in that event over many years. He has a double through-knee congenital amputation and runs on prosthetic blades. Richard not only dominates the track, winning gold at every World Championships since 2011, but he also is a world record holder for athletes with a double above-knee amputation in both the full and half marathon. In 2013, he ran from John O'Groats to Lands' End (1000 miles) in his "Richard Whitehead Runs Britain". Richard ran to raise funds for and awareness of Sarcoma UK and Scope. A little-known fact is that he originally competed for Great Britain in Para Ice Hockey at the Winter Paralympics at Turin 2006 before making a successful transition to athletics.

The Paralympic Games

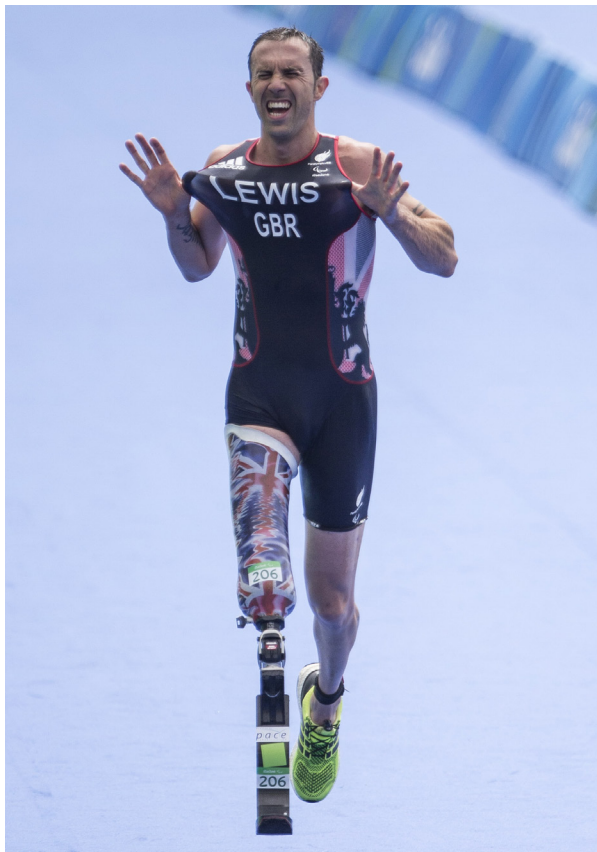
Amazing facts

- The name 'Paralympic' comes from the Greek word 'para' which means 'beside' or 'alongside'. The name means a competition held in parallel with the Olympic Games.
- The Paralympic Games grew out of the pioneering work of German neurologist Ludwig Guttmann who, in 1948, organised an archery competition at Stoke Mandeville Hospital as part of the rehabilitation process for active service personnel with severe spinal injuries.
- The first official Paralympic Games were held in Rome in 1960. Only athletes in wheelchairs were included.
- Specialist racing wheelchairs were used for the first time at the Toronto 1976 Paralympic Games.



Ellie Simmonds, GB Paralympian swimmer

- Paralympic archer, Antonio Rebello, released a burning arrow to light the Cauldron at the 1992 Barcelona Games.
- Tanni-Grey Thompson, one of Great Britain's most successful female Paralympians, won a total of 11 Gold medals, four Silver and one Bronze.
- American swimmer Jessica Long was 12 years old when she won gold in the 100m Freestyle and 400m Freestyle at Athens 2004, making her the youngest ever individual Gold medallist at a Paralympic Games.
- Ellie Simmonds became a double Gold medallist swimmer at the Beijing 2008 Paralympic Games at the age of 13. She won one Gold, one Silver and a Bronze medal in London 2012 and another Gold and Bronze medal at the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games.
- More than 4,000 of the world's best, disabled athletes from over 160 nations competed in the London 2012 Paralympic Games.
- ParalympicsGB won 120 medals – 18 more than in Beijing in 2008. At the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games, ParalympicsGB bettered this total again, securing 147 medals.
- The sports of Paralympic Canoeing and Paralympic Triathlon were added to the competition programme at Rio 2016.



Andrew Lewis, GB Paralympian para-triathlete