

THE OLYMPIC GAMES (8)

The 1932 Olympic Games of Los Angeles, California

The nations of the world were in a financial recession, but the weather in Los Angeles for the 1932 Olympic Games was grand! Thirty-seven nations and over fourteen hundred athletes in fourteen sports took part. The US sponsored sixty fewer athletes to LA (340) than they had sent to Amsterdam in 1928 (400). The sixty-nine member Brazilian team was so financially strapped that the government gave the athletes coffee beans to be sold in various ports of call to raise money for the team. On arrival in LA, forty-five of the athletes could not disembark because they did not have the one dollar per person landing fee to do so! Twenty nations had to decline entry due to the lack of travel funds. The Norwegian team was financed by a locally affluent Norwegian. Most athletes protested living together with other foreign athletes in the first "Olympic Village." William May Garland, the President of the LA Olympic Organizing Committee and a real estate magnet, constructed 550 two room cottages on a 250 acre plot called Baldwin Hills. All the male athletes and coaches were housed in the village for a nominal fee. Once the athletes took up residence in the village, they had a change of attitude and enjoyed the opportunity to intermingle with athletes from different countries. Daily record crowds averaging 60,000 spectators at the LA Memorial Coliseum. The spectators exhibited a high level of sportsmanship to all the competitors. Unexpectedly, Jim Thorpe, US Olympian, found himself outside the stadium because he did not have the admission fee of three dollars.

Inside the stadium, Paavo Nurmi, the best distance runner in the world and a nine time Olympic gold medalist was disqualified just before the opening ceremonies for padding his expense account during the European racing season. Vice President Charles Curtis broke the standing tradition of the Games being opened by the host nation's head of state. President Herbert Hoover was too busy campaigning to be reelected president of the US to open the Games. Photo electronic scoring was in place for the first time and just in time in the opinion of sprinter Eddie Tolan of the US. The photo proved that Eddie the gum-chewing, short, stocky, bespectacled sprinter had edged Ralph Metcalfe in the 100 meters to become the first black gold medalist in Olympic Games history. Texan Mildred "Babe" Didriksen Zaharias won gold's in the javelin and the eighty meter hurdles. She could have won the high jump but was disqualified to second for the using the "illegal western roll" style. The western roll then became the technique of choice for high jumpers the very next season. The Japanese swimmers were breathing pure oxygen on the pool deck and winning all the men's swimming events. One event they didn't win was the four hundred meters. Clarence "Buster" Crabbe, a law student and clothing store clerk won the four hundred meter freestyle with Johnny Weissmuller of Tarzan fame and the MGM Studios cheered him on. Crabbe almost immediately signed a movie contract with the rival Paramount Studios to make the movie *King of the Jungle*. In addition to a slim profit and a lot of record breaking, the LA Games were more open to racial diversity and ethnic background differences than in any previous Olympic Games. All of this would



change in Berlin for 1936!

The 1936 Olympic Games of Berlin, Germany

The 1936 Games were awarded to Berlin prior to the Third Reich coming to power in Germany. Over four thousand athletes from nearly fifty nations competed in nineteen sports. Before the Games the American media was already reporting on discrimination against Jews in Germany by the new government. In spite of these news reports, the US Olympic committee voted to not boycott the Games by a very close margin. On the sea voyage to Europe, the three-time Olympian and the 1932 backstroke gold medalist; Eleanor Holm Jarrett chose to fraternize with news media reporters in a piano bar lounge. Jarrett was a professional singer in her husband's band. US Olympic Committee President Avery Brundage removed Eleanor, "the champagne lady," from swimming the back stroke in the Games. No Jews had been selected to the German Olympic teams in spite of the fact that several Jews were gold medalist in the Games of 1932. In the four by one hundred relay, Brundage allowed the removal of Sam Stoller and Marty Glickman who were both Jewish from the relay lineup. This gave Jesse Owens the opportunity to win a fourth gold medal in the relay to go with his long jump, the 100 meters and the 200 meters successes. Sohn Kee Chung, a Korean marathon runner, won the gold medal in the marathon. He had been forced to change his name to Kitel Son and represent Japan because the Japanese were militarily occupying Korea. He was so bitter about the experience that he never ran in competition again. The Spanish delegation left Berlin early to return home the civil war in Spain. IOC President Henri de Baillet-Latour deplored Hitler's show boating during the Games. Hitler never seemed available to award medals to the US black athletes and to acknowledge them publically.

Television in a crude form made its first appearance at Berlin Games. The Olympic village was much more elaborate than in Los Angeles. The tradition of runners carrying the Olympic flame from Greece to the host nation of the Olympic Games was born. Leni Riefenstahl's film *Olympia* recorded many of the memorable moments from the Berlin Games. The next two Olympic Games were canceled due to the outbreak of World War II!

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