

Olympic Swimming History

There are only 4 disciplines that have been part of the Olympics since the Modern Games of 1896: Athletics, Fencing, Gymnastics and Swimming

1896 Athens: Held in the Mediterranean Sea. Alfred Hajos swam the 100 Free in 55 degree water in a time of 1:22 using a trudgen stroke. His quote: "My will to live completely overcame my desire to win." Events: 100, 500, 1,200 Free and the 100 Free for sailors

1900 Paris: Held in the River Seine. Events: 200, 1,500 and 4,000 Free, 200 Back, Underwater event and an obstacle race: swimmers swam out to different boats, the winning time was 2:38.4

1904 St. Louis: The only Olympics that were measured in yards. Held in an artificial lake. Events: 50, 100, 200, 400, 880, 1,500 Free and 440 Breast. Also had the Plunge for Distance event: William Dickey was the gold medalist and local legend in the plunge.

1908 London: First time to race in a man-made facility: a 100 Meter Bath (pool). Events: 100, 400, 1,500 Free, 100 Back, 200 Breast, 4 x 200 Free Relay

1912 Stockholm: First time women could swim, they had 2 events: 100 Free and 4 x 100 Free Relay, First time for electric timing. Men's Events: 100, 400, 1,500 Free, 100 Back, 200 and 400 Breast, 4 x 200 Free Relay

1920 Antwerp: Hawaii's Duke Kahanamoku won 3 golds and 2 silvers. He acted in several movies, and is credited with swimming innovations such as the flutter kick and front crawl. Events: same as above and added 400 Free for women

1924 Paris: 1st time to have lane lines made of cork. Johnny Weissmuller won Olympic gold and portrayed Tarzan in 12 films. Events: 100, 400, 1,500 Free, 100 Back, 200 Breast and the 4 x 200 Free Relay. The 400 Breast was dropped for men and 100 Back was added for women.

1928 Amsterdam: Johnny Weissmuller swallowed water, but still managed to win the 100 meter free in record time.

1932 Los Angeles: Japan dominated. Except for the 400 which was won by Buster Crabbe. He starred in movies such as Flash Gordon and Tarzan

1936 Berlin: First time to use diving blocks. Eleanor Holm was favored to win but got kicked off the team for carousing aboard the SS Manhattan on the voyage to Europe. She did get to play Jane in Tarzan movies

1948 London: First time to have an indoor 50 meter pool. The US men swept all 6 events. Breaststroke is evolving. Swimmers swam almost the entire length underwater without breathing, this eventually was not allowed due to the difficulty

1952 Helsinki: First time to use the tumble turn (flip turn). Breaststroke continues to evolve, breaststrokes use an overarm recovery with the breaststroke kick. It was deemed unfair in competition and led to the butterfly stroke.

1956 Melbourne: First time to add Fly: 200 Fly for Men and 100 Fly for Women. Australian men and women do very well.

1960 Rome: First time to add the 4 x 100 Medley Relay for Men and Women. Dawn Fraser became the first woman to successfully defend an Olympic swimming title. Except her teammates ostracized her because she refused to swim on the relay.

1964 Tokyo: First time to have an IM. It was the 400 IM for Men and Women and the 200 Back was added for men. Don Schollander became the first swimmer to win 4 golds at a single Games and Dawn Fraser won the 100 Free for the 3rd time in the Olympics.

1968 Mexico City: First time to have 800 Free for women, they were considered too delicate for this event in the past. Events increased: women went from 8 to 14 and men went from 10 to 15. The 200 IM was added. The 100 and 200 were added for all strokes. Debbie Meyer was the first swimmer to win 3 individual gold medals at one Olympics.

1972 Munich: Mark Spitz wins 7 gold medals to set a single Games record for any sport. On the woman's side, 15 year old Shane Gould's performance would have been big as she got 3 world records, 3 gold medals and five total medals, but this was diminished by Spitz's performance. She got bored and quit swimming at the age of 16. Times are now recorded to the hundredths.

1976 Montreal: First time goggles are allowed. East Germany won 11 of 13 women's races. Suspicions of substance abuse by the East Germans were eventually confirmed in the 1990s. The US men won 12 of 13 events. John Naber won 5 medals. The only gold medal from the women was their upset of the 4 x 100 Free Relay. One of the greatest relays of all time with Jill Sterkel, Kim Peyton, Wendy Baglioli, and Shirley Babashoff!

1980 Moscow: USA Boycotts due to the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. 64 other countries did not attend.

1984 Los Angeles: The US won 21 of 29 events. The Soviets and East Germans were absent. Big names were: Mary T. Meagher, Tracy Caulkins, Pablo Morales, and Rowdy Gaines. West Germany's Michael Gross won the 200 Free. The rule changes to allow only 2 swimmers per event (previous years there were 3).

1988 Seoul: First time to have the 50 Free for Men and Women. East Germany's Kristin Otto won 6 gold medals. East Germans won 10 out of 15 events. Janet Evans won the 400 IM, 400 Free and the 800 Free. Matt Biondi attempted to equal Mark Spitz's record, but came close with

5 golds, a silver and a bronze. First time the underwater dolphin kick was used in backstroke by David Berkoff.

1992 Barcelona: 50 Free show down with defending champ, Matt Biondi and world record holder: Tom Jager, the unexpected winner was Alexander Popov. Summer Sanders won 4 medals. Germany's Franziska van Almsick was 14 and won 4 medals. Then Kyoko Iwasaki of Japan became the youngest Olympic champion in the 200 breaststroke six days after turning 14. First time to use the new backstroke flip turn.

1996 Atlanta: The women's 4 x 200 Free Relay is added. Another 50 meter Free show down between Gary Hall Jr and Alexander Popov. Amy Van Dyken upset the Chinese and became the first American woman to win four gold medals at one Olympics. China, which had taken 9 medals in Barcelona and 12 of 16 world titles in 1994 only managed one gold and six total medals.

2000 Sydney: Peter van den Hoogenband upset Aussie star Ian Thorpe in the 200 free. Misty Hyman upset Australian Susie O'Neill in the 200 fly. Dara Torres won 5 medals and was the first swimmer to compete in 4 Games. Jenny Thompson won her 10th career Olympic medal.

2004 Athens: Michael Phelps wins 6 gold and 2 bronze medals. Aaron Peirsol won the 100 Back by nearly 2 seconds and was disqualified for an illegal turn. The US lodged a protest and FINA overturned the disqualification.

2008 Beijing: 10k Open Water Event is added for men and women. Michael Phelps made history by winning 8 gold medals which made him the most successful athlete in a single Olympics. The 4 x 100 Men's Free relay remains one of the greatest relays of all time, with Jason Lesak swimming the fastest split ever recorded. Dara Torres was the oldest US woman to swim at the Olympics at the age of 41 and won 3 silver medals. Natalie Coughlin won 6 medals.

2012 London: USA wins gold in half of the 32 pool events. Big names: Phelps 6 medals, Missy Franklin 4 golds and a bronze, Katie Ledecky gold in the 800, Rebecca Soni gold and silver in the breaststroke events, Elizabeth Beisel, Allison Schmitt and Caitlin Leverenz also earn medals.

2016 Rio de Janeiro: USA wins a medal in all but three events, 16 of those were gold. Michael Phelps won 5 golds and brought his total to 23 career Olympic medals. Anthony Ervin stunned the world by winning the 50 free after winning it 16 years earlier in Sydney. Katie Ledecky won 4 gold medals and a silver. Simone Manuel claimed gold in the 100 and silver in the 50 and became the first African American woman to win an individual swimming medal.

2020 Tokyo: The 800 Free is added for men, the 1,500 Free is added for women and there will be a new event the Mixed 4 x 100 Medley Relay.

