



GOING FOR GOLD

So you want to know how the Olympics started, eh? Well, you would have to travel back almost 3000 years and well over 1000

miles to my home city of Athens to see that! Luckily, museums across the world house pottery that depicts men competing in the original games, in events such as running, wrestling and chariot racing.

There are even records that date back to 776 BCE that list the names of past winners. Amazing or what?

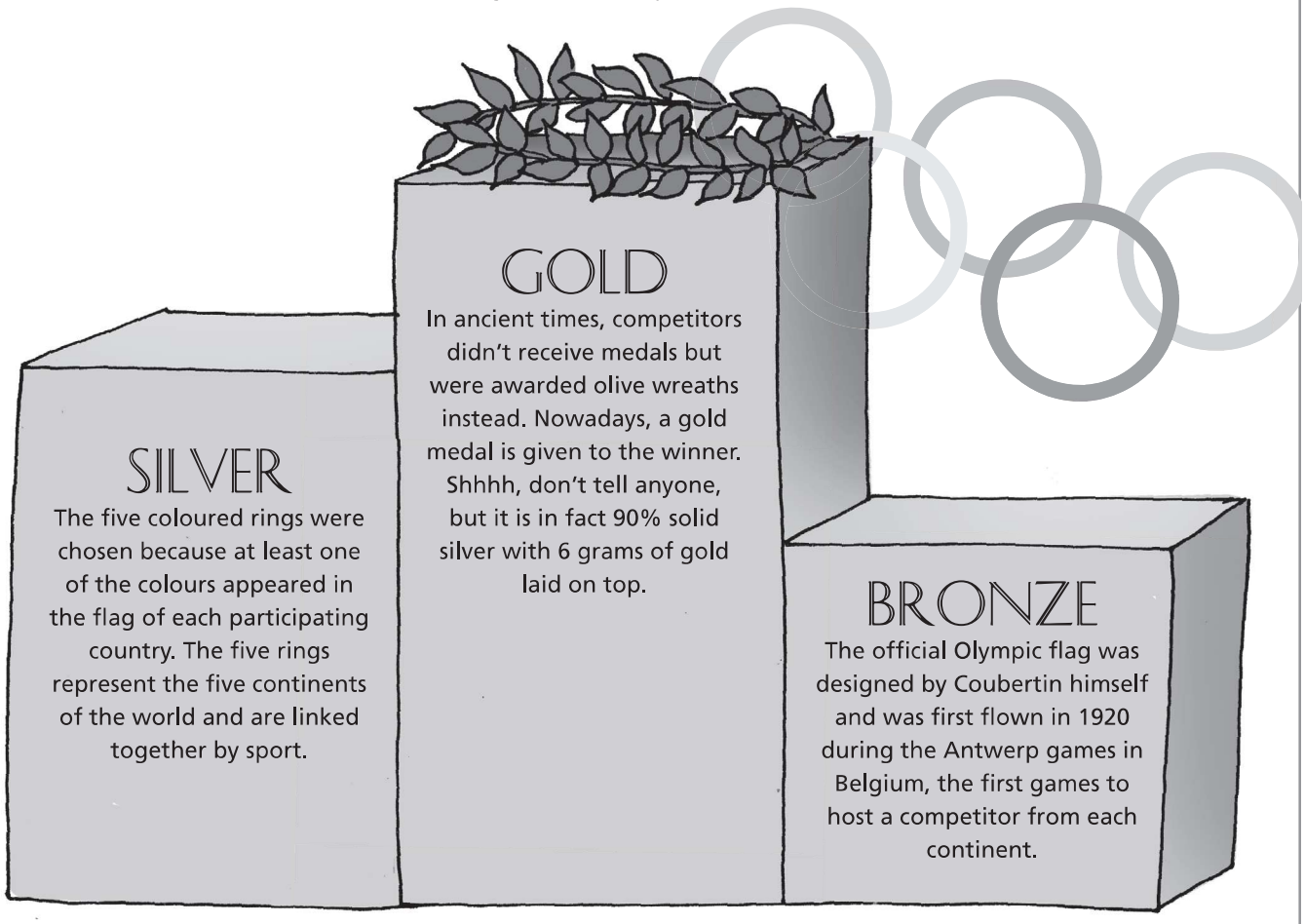


I know what you're thinking. If the games were so popular, why did they disappear? That's an easy one - blame Roman Emperor Theodosius II! You see, the original games were held in honour of the Greek gods, so when he banned all non-Christian worship across the Roman Empire the games were forced to grind to a halt. It would take just over 1500 years and a Frenchman to breathe life into them once again.

It seems strange now, but when Baron Pierre de Coubertin, father of the modern Olympics, first dreamt of bringing back this ancient tradition, he found little support. However, after a lot of persuading, the first modern games took place right here in Athens! For ten glorious days in June 1896, around 245 men took part in 43 different sports such as discus and the long jump. Notice, though, I said 'men'. It would take another four years before women were allowed to compete (in golf, of all things) and another twelve before they were allowed on the track and field. How sexist!

And what about today? Well I'm sure you'll agree that the games seem to be going as strong as ever, with billions of viewers tuning in every four years to cheer on their favourite sporting heroes. Fantastic!

I'm off now. All this talk about the Olympics has inspired me to go out there and do some sport, so I'll leave you with a podium of Olympic facts I think you'll find interesting. Now, where did I leave my chariot...?



SILVER

The five coloured rings were chosen because at least one of the colours appeared in the flag of each participating country. The five rings represent the five continents of the world and are linked together by sport.

GOLD

In ancient times, competitors didn't receive medals but were awarded olive wreaths instead. Nowadays, a gold medal is given to the winner. Shhhh, don't tell anyone, but it is in fact 90% solid silver with 6 grams of gold laid on top.

BRONZE

The official Olympic flag was designed by Coubertin himself and was first flown in 1920 during the Antwerp games in Belgium, the first games to host a competitor from each continent.