



# Los Angeles 1984: An indelible legacy

Like London and Paris before it, Los Angeles will host the Olympic Summer Games for a third time in 2028. To mark that milestone we look back at the two previous editions the Californian metropolis has staged. Lit up by the performances of Carl Lewis, Los Angeles 1984 remains fresh in the memory, thanks to some unforgettable sporting moments and the legacy it left behind.

 9 min

Updated on 27 June 2023 10:50 GMT-7





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The sole candidate to stage the Olympic Summer Games 1984, the “City of Angels” was confirmed as host city at the 80th IOC Session on 18 May 1978, becoming just the third city to stage the modern Olympic Games twice, after Paris (1900 and 1924) and London (1908 and 1948).

The Californian city’s second Olympic Games were the first to be organised without state funding since the inaugural Games of the modern era in 1896. The Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee (LAOOC), under the guidance of Peter Ueberroth, was therefore obliged to make use of existing facilities and secure financial support from the private sector. In the end the Games generated a profit of USD 223 million, setting a benchmark for future Games.



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The Games of the XXIII Olympiad took place four years after the US-led boycott of Moscow 1980 and gave the Soviet Union the opportunity to retaliate by heading up a 14-nation boycott of their own. Though relatively small in number, those countries accounted for no fewer than 58 percent of the gold medals that had been won at Montreal 1976. Despite the boycott, a record number of 140 countries sent delegations to Los Angeles 1984. And the atmosphere at the Opening Ceremony was distinctly festive, to the extent that the athletes broke ranks and started dancing with each other, a practice usually reserved for closing ceremonies.



Kishimoto/IOC

## Female sport gains ground

Los Angeles 1984 featured a total of 6,829 athletes (1,566 women and 5,263 men) competing in 221 events across 21 sports. It was at these Games that women's sport began to make its presence genuinely felt on the programme, with the exclusively female disciplines of rhythmic gymnastics and synchronised swimming making their Olympic debuts, along with women's shooting and road cycling and the women's 400m hurdles and marathon. Windsurfing was also added to the sailing events (featuring on the official programme for the men, and as a demonstration event for the women). Meanwhile, tennis returned to the Olympic fold after a 60-year absence, albeit as a demonstration sport, alongside another US favourite, baseball.



Kishimoto/IOC



Just as in 1932, the majestic Memorial Coliseum was the focal point, providing the venue for the Opening and Closing Ceremonies and the athletics events. Having been converted into a velodrome for Los Angeles' first Olympic Games, the Rose Bowl in Pasadena was once again redeployed, this time for the men's football tournament. It was just one of many existing facilities to be drafted into use for the Games: Pauley Pavilion became the venue for the gymnastics events; The Forum in Inglewood hosted the basketball competitions, Long Beach Convention Center staged both the fencing and volleyball, the Memorial Sports Arena played host to the boxing, while the Titan Gymnasium in Fullerton staged the handball. Built from the 1950s onwards, these venues owed their existence to the growth in the number of leading professional and college sports teams in the city as well as its world-famous arts and entertainment industry.



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In fact, only two new venues were built for the 1984 Games: the Olympic Swim Stadium at the University of Southern California (USC), which was used for the diving, swimming and synchronised swimming events; and the Olympic Velodrome situated on the campus of California State University at Dominguez Hills (CSUDH), for the track cycling competition.

The athletes were accommodated in style at one of three Olympic Villages, sited on university campuses: the USC, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). As well as offering every conceivable amenity, each of the Villages also boasted first-rate training facilities.



IOC/PAHUD, Jean-François

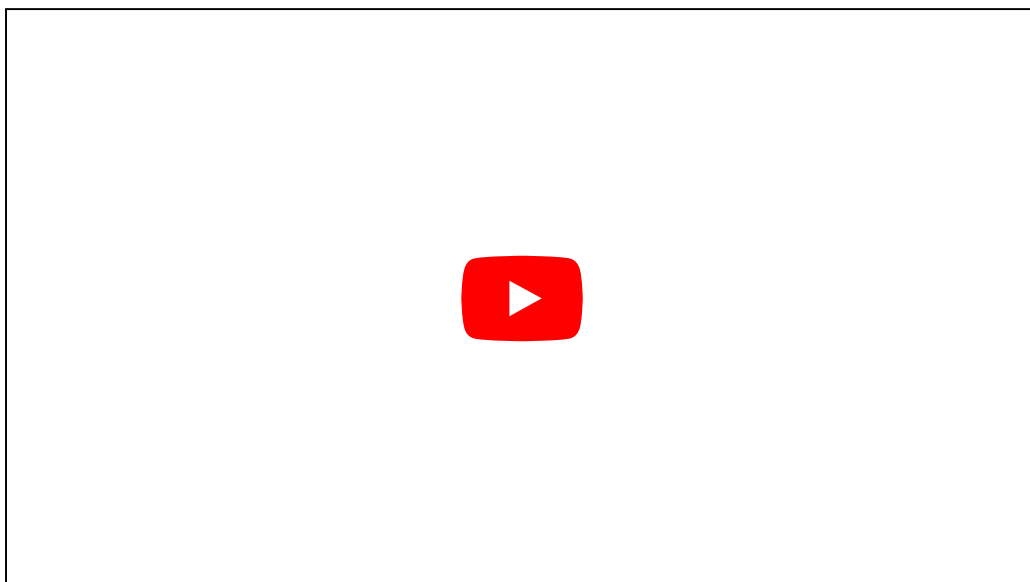
## A memorable start

Held at the Memorial Coliseum on 28 July 1984, the Opening Ceremony of the Games of the XXIII Olympiad was a memorable occasion. Among its many highlights was the appearance of rocketman Bill Sutor flying through the air in a jet pack. The packed stands played their part by providing a colourful backdrop, with spectators holding up placards to create mosaics of the national flags of all the participating countries, while Lionel Richie performed his hit song All Night Long.

US President Ronald Reagan declared the Games open and the Olympic Torch Relay reached its conclusion, with the legendary Jesse Owens entering the stadium with the Torch in his hand and completing a lap before passing it on to Rafer Johnson, who had been the USA's flagbearer at Rome 1960, where he won decathlon gold.



After jogging up the flight of stairs installed beneath the central arch of the peristyle, Johnson lit the five Olympic rings positioned on the front of the stadium's impressive main archway. The flame then made its way up to the impressive torch-shaped Olympic cauldron, built for the 1932 Games, which would burn brightly for the next 16 days.



## Carl Lewis, the brightest star of them all

Already an icon of world athletics by the time the Games got under way, the 23-year-old Carl Lewis cemented that status by winning four gold medals, equalling Jesse Owens' Berlin 1936 haul. Lewis began by winning the 100m on 4 August in a time of 9.99 seconds; two days later he jumped 8.54m with his first attempt to win long jump gold. On 8 August he added the 200m gold, secured in an Olympic-record time of 19.80 seconds. He then completed his golden quadruple by running the anchor





Making their debut on the Olympic stage, the People's Republic of China won their first ever medal courtesy of Xu Haifeng, who collected gold in the men's 50m pistol. However, it was gymnast Li Ning who emerged as China's undisputed superstar in Los Angeles. He made six trips to the podium in all, picking up gold in the floor, rings and pommel horse, silver in the team all-around and vault, and bronze in the individual all-around. Ning's compatriots would never forget his achievements, and he was granted the honour of lighting the Olympic cauldron at Beijing 2008, an act he performed after memorably running around the rim of the Olympic Stadium, suspended by wires.



Kishimoto/IOC



the first and only man to date to win successive Olympic 1,500m titles. Just as he had done at Moscow 1980, Coe also won silver in the 800m; he was pipped to the line by Brazil's Joaquim Cruz, who went unbeaten at the distance that season and who remains the only Brazilian to have landed an Olympic track gold. Another British athlete to claim the limelight was Daley Thompson, the decathlon world record holder, who retained the title he had won in Moscow four years earlier. Also making a return to the top of the podium was the USA's Ed Moses, who won the men's 400m hurdle gold for the second time in his career, the first having come at Montreal 1976.



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Olympic gold. Three days later, her compatriot Said Aouita brought more joy to Morocco by winning the men's 5,000m. Elsewhere on the track, the USA's Valerie Brisco-Hooks completed a rare 200m/400m double before adding a third gold in the 4x100m relay, while fellow American Joan Benoit won the inaugural women's Olympic marathon.



Kishimoto/IOC

Another athlete who got the home crowds cheering was the irrepressible 16-year-old gymnast Mary-Lou Retton, who won five medals in total: the USA's first ever gold in the women's individual all-around, silvers in the team all-around and the vault, and bronzes in the uneven bars and the floor. Meanwhile, home-grown diving legend Greg Louganis completed a 3m springboard/10m platform double with plenty to spare; a feat he repeated in Seoul four years later.

The USA also excelled in the pool, where their women won each one of the freestyle, butterfly, medley and relay events. The most decorated male swimmer of the Games, however, was Germany's Michael



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In rowing, Great Britain's Steve Redgrave won coxed four gold, the first of his five Olympic titles in as many Games, while Michael Jordan, Chris Mullin and Patrick Ewing formed part of the USA side that clinched basketball gold with a 96-65 defeat of Spain in the final. All three went on to become leading members of the "Dream Team" that would captivate the world at Barcelona 1992.



road race gold. Elsewhere, New Zealand archer Neroli Fairhall made Olympic history by becoming the first paraplegic athlete to compete at the Games.



## Legacy

Born on 2 September 1937, the very same day that Pierre de Coubertin died, LAOOC chair Ueberroth introduced an ambitious and innovative sponsorship programme for the Games, coming up with a model of product category exclusivity that ultimately inspired the creation of the IOC's Olympic Partner (TOP) programme.

Decorated with the Olympic Order, Ueberroth was Time magazine's "Man of the Year". Meanwhile, the sizeable profit generated by the 1984 Games was used to fund the launch of the LA84 Foundation, which to this day continues to promote and advocate sports participation in Southern California and commissions research on the impact it has on the lives of the local population. The Foundation also boasts one of the world's largest sports library collections.



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Many of the sites used at Los Angeles 1984 will be reused when the city hosts the Games again in 2028, including the Memorial Coliseum and the Rose Bowl (both of which will be featuring at their third Games), while the UCLA campus will host the Olympic Village. As was the case in 1932 and 1984, only a small number of new venues will need to be built. While they will mostly be temporary in nature, some, such as the LA Stadium in Hollywood Park, are already under construction as part of projects not forming part of the city's Olympic bid. Intertwined with its sporting history, the Olympic history of Los Angeles continues to unfold, ensuring that its two previous editions of the Games remain firmly in the collective memory and providing a solid framework for the future legacy of the Games of the XXXIV Olympiad



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