

This Day in History... July 19, 1980

1980 Summer Olympics

On July 19, 1980, the Summer Olympic Games opened in Moscow, Soviet Union. They were the first Olympics to be held in Eastern Europe.

Moscow was selected as the host city for these games in 1974, beating out Los Angeles by 19 votes. The games would only include 80 nations, the smallest number since 1956, as a result of protests led by US President Jimmy Carter.

In late December 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and began nearly 10 years of fighting between the two countries. The invasion was sparked by a Soviet desire to keep communist leaders in power in Afghanistan. In response, US President Jimmy Carter denounced the Soviet Union's actions and gave a State of the Union address to America promising to keep Middle East oil supplies safe from Soviet influence.



These stamps were issued before the US decided to boycott the games.

Carter also imposed economic sanctions, a trade embargo, and led a boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow. Eventually, 65 other countries joined in the boycott as well. In spite of this, athletes from some of those nations still participated, playing under the Olympic flag.

Many of the boycotting countries attended the Liberty Bell Classic (commonly called the "Olympic Boycott Games") in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, instead. Four years later, the Summer Olympics were held in Los Angeles, California, and the Soviet Union and its allies boycotted them in response to the 1980 boycott.

In spite of the controversy surrounding the games in Moscow, they went ahead as planned, opening on July 19, 1980. The opening ceremony included a parade of Greek chariots and a series of artistic performances. Among these performances were a dance suite of the traditional dances of the 15 Soviet republics, a gymnastics display, and a children's performance.

In all, 5,179 athletes (4,064 men and 1,115 women) from 80 nations participated in 203 events in 21 sports during the games. A total of 21% of the competitors were female, the highest percentage up to that point. And the total of 203 events was the most up to that time in Olympic history.

More records were set than at the Montreal Olympics, with 36 World records, 39 European records, and 74 Olympic records. Throughout the games, new Olympic records were set 241 times and world records were beaten 97 times.

Seven nations made their first Olympic appearances: Angola, Botswana, Laos, Jordan, Seychelles, Mozambique, and Cyprus. Additionally, Zimbabwe made its first appearance under its new name, having previously competed as Rhodesia while under minority-white control.

The games came to an end on August 3. In all, Russia won the most medals with 195, of which 80 were gold.

The US 1980 Olympic Games Stamps

In late 1979, the USPS issued several stamps and postal items in anticipation of the Olympics, mere months before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. After that invasion and President Jimmy Carter's call to boycott the games, the stamps were removed from sale. That quickly drove up demand for the stamps. Dealers were paying up to seven times the face value of the stamps. The day after the games ended, the USPS suddenly made all the stamps available through the philatelic bureau. They stated it was to honor "the fine men and women of the US Olympic team who [had] sacrificed months and years of training."



Issued September 1979



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