

# This Day in History... July 29, 1948

## 1948 Olympic Games



*Great Britain stamps issued to commemorate these games.*

On July 29, 1948, London opened the Games of the XIV Olympiad. They were the first summer games held since Berlin in 1936, having been delayed due to World War II.

The 1940 games had originally been scheduled to take place in Tokyo. However, the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War forced them to forfeit the games. The games were then awarded to Helsinki, Finland, who had been the runner-up in the initial bidding. Those games were slated to take place from July 20 to August 4, 1940. However, with the outbreak of World War II in Europe, those games were cancelled indefinitely.



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In 1939, London was selected to host the 1944 Summer Games. However, the war forced those games to be cancelled as well. In 1945, the International Olympic Committee began planning the 1948 games. Great Britain nearly forfeited the games to the US due to post-war economic troubles and rationing. However, King George VI saw the games as an opportunity to help the country recover after the war and show its strength. So Great Britain was selected to host the games, making them the second city to host the games twice (after Paris). In 2012, they would become the first city to host the games three times.

At the time of the games, Britain was still observing war-time rationing of food, fuel, and building materials. This led to the 1948 Olympics being called the "Austerity Games." No new venues were constructed, and athletes slept and lived in existing housing. The athletes did receive increased rations, similar to those given to dockers and miners.

The games opened on July 29, 1948, at Wembley Park's Empire Stadium. Lord Burghley welcomed the athletes, royal family, and spectators saying, "Your majesty: the hour has struck. A visionary dream has today become a glorious reality. At the end of the worldwide struggle in 1945, many institutions and associations were found to have withered and only the strongest had survived. How, many wondered, had the great Olympic Movement prospered?" He went on to welcome the athletes to two weeks of "keen but friendly rivalry" and said the games were a "warm flame of hope for a better understanding in the world which has burned so low."



*These were the first games to include women's canoeing.*



*Because poor weather interrupted the basketball competitions in 1936, the sport was moved indoors for the first time during the 1948 games.*

The 1948 games included 136 medal events for 23 disciplines in 17 different sports and arts. These were the last games to include an arts competition. The arts included sports-related architecture, literature, music, painting, and sculpture. Basketball was played for the second time as a medal sport, and these were the first games to have it played inside. These were the first games to include women's canoeing and lacrosse was played as an exhibition sport.

Dutch sprinter Fanny Blankers-Koen was one of the breakout stars, nicknamed the "Flying Housewife." Competing in the decathlon, American Bob Mathias became the youngest man to win an Olympic gold medal at the age of 17. And Finland's Veikko Huhtanen won the most individual medals – three gold, one silver, and one bronze in men's gymnastics.

A total of 59 nations participated, including 14 that made their first Olympic appearances. 4,104 athletes participated – 3,714 men and 390 women. Germany and Japan were not invited to participate, as they were under post-war military occupation. By the games' end, the US had the most gold medals (38) and the most medals overall (84), followed by Sweden and France. Great Britain ranked 12th with three gold medals and 23 medals total.

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