

This Day in History... August 8, 2008

Opening of the 2008 Summer Olympics

The Games of the XXIX Olympiad opened in Beijing, China, on August 8, 2008.

A total of five cities vied to host the 2008 Olympics. Beijing was selected as the host city at a meeting of the International Olympic Committee on July 13, 2001.

In preparation for the Olympics, Beijing built 12 new venues, for a total of 37 facilities. The official logo of the 2008 Summer Olympics, titled "Dancing Beijing," was a stylized representation of the character *jing*, which means capital, a reference to the host city of Beijing.

The slogan for the 2008 Summer Olympic Games was "One World, One Dream," a call to the people of the world to join together in peace in the Olympic spirit. The mascots of the games, the *Fuwa*, were good luck dolls. The five *Fuwa* were a fish, a giant panda, fire, a Tibetan antelope, and a swallow. Each of these is symbolic of the five elements of Chinese philosophy: water, metal, fire, wood, and earth. Using the first syllable of each of the mascot's names results in a phrase translated as "Beijing welcomes you."

The 2008 Olympic Torch was designed to resemble traditional Chinese scrolls. The torch relay ran for 130 days across 85,000 miles, the longest relay since the 1936 games. In all, 21,880 torchbearers from around the world participated in the relay. The relay traveled around the world and faced anti-Chinese protests in several cities.

The opening ceremonies began at 8:08:08 on August 8, 2008. The number eight is a symbol of prosperity and luck in China. The ceremonies lasted over four hours and included over 15,000 performers. The whole ceremony was directed by Chinese filmmaker Zhang Yimou and was divided into two parts – "Brilliant Civilization" and "Glorious Era" – celebrating Chinese history and its hopes for world harmony. Many considered it one of the finest ceremonies in history, and it was watched by more than 4 billion people (about two-thirds of the world's population at the time).

In all, there were 28 sports with 302 events scheduled (165 men's events and 127 women's events, plus 10 mixed events). A total of 11,028 athletes from 204 nations competed in the events. This meant that all but one (Brunei) of the National Olympic Committees participated. Additionally, three countries participated in the games for the first time: the Marshall Islands, Montenegro, and Tuvalu.

China and the US had the largest teams with 639 and 596 athletes respectively. China won the most gold medals with 51, and a total of 100 medals. The US took home 36 gold medals for a total of 112 medals. American swimmer Michael Phelps also set a record for the most gold medals won by a single athlete with eight.

The 2008 Olympics were notable for many reasons. It was the most watched sporting event in history and earned several Guinness World Records, including: "Largest TV audience for an event", "Most participants at a Summer Olympic Games", "Longest distance for an Olympic torch relay" and "Most watched US television program of all time."

In 2015, Beijing was selected to host the 2022 Winter Olympics, making it the first city to host a Summer and Winter Olympic Games.



Issued in June 2008 to commemorate the Beijing Olympics.



Set of six China stamps picturing the games' mascots participating in events.

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