

From Past to Future: Türkiye in the Modern Olympic Games

Geçmişten Geleceğe: Modern Olimpiyat Oyunlarında Türkiye

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The history of the Olympics dates back to 776 BC, and possibly even earlier. Initially, these events aimed to strengthen cooperation between Greek city-states and had inherently religious characteristics. However, by 393 AD, the religious aspects of the Olympic Games were seen as a reflection of pagan beliefs, leading to their cessation until 1896 due to the rising influence of Christianity (1-2).

In 1896, the Olympic flame was reignited by the efforts of Pierre de Coubertin. Since the Athens Summer Olympic Games were held from April 6-15, 1896, considered the beginning of the modern Olympics, the Games have continued to be held every four years, barring extraordinary circumstances (3).

Archival documents reveal that the Ottoman Empire was aware of the Athens 1896 Summer Olympic Games, marking the revival of the modern Olympic Games (4). However, due to the prevailing conditions within the state, the Ottoman Empire did not officially participate in the Athens 1896 Summer Olympic Games, nor in the subsequent Paris 1900 Summer Olympic Games and St. Louis 1904 Summer Olympic Games (5).

Although the Ottoman Empire did not officially participate in the Athens 1906 Summer Olympic Games, it is understood that some athletes from the Ottoman Empire participated in the competitions on their own accord (6). The first official participation of the Ottoman Empire in the Olympic Games occurred at the London 1908 Summer Olympic Games (Aleko Mulos, gymnastics) and the Stockholm 1912 Summer Olympic Games (Mrktic Mkryan, athletics; Vahram Haret Papazyran, athletics) (5).

The Olympic Games planned for Berlin in 1916 were not held due to World War I (1). Since the Ottoman Empire sided with Germany during World War I, it was not invited to the Antwerp 1920 Summer Olympic Games (7).

The Paris 1924 Summer Olympic Games (May 4, 1924 - July 27, 1924) marked the first Olympic participation and international sports event for the newly established Republic of Türkiye (8). As in many fields, the great leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who recognized the importance of sports for both individual and societal development, ensured that Türkiye took part in international sporting events (9). Consequently, the Paris 1924 Summer Olympic Games were considered crucial for representing the Republic of Türkiye in international sports events (8). To establish the necessary administrative structure, the Türkiye Training Community Alliance (*Tr. Türkiye İdman Cemiyetleri İttifakı*) was registered as a non-profit organization (10), and the budget allocated for the Olympics was transferred to this organization by a decision of the Council of Ministers, chaired by Ghazi Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) (8). The allocated budget was used for various purposes, such as creating informative written documents about the Olympics and certain sports disciplines, appointing foreign coaches to prepare athletes for the competitions, etc. (11).

Selection competitions were held in Eskişehir to determine the athletes who would represent the state in the Olympics. Selected athletes were taken to a training camp, and the most successful ones, along with officials responsible for the team, were granted the necessary permissions to be sent to Paris (11-16). The delegation, consisting of 41 athletes who received positive responses to their permission requests, represented our country at the Paris 1924 Summer Olympic Games (5). Although our country did not win any medals at the end of the Games, it was significant that the young Republic, which had not yet completed its first year, and the Turkish flag were represented in the organization alongside other states.

The first Winter Olympic Games that Türkiye participated in were held in Garmisch in 1936 (5). It is known that Türkiye did not participate in both the Summer and Winter Olympic

Received / Geliş: 10.08.2024 · Accepted / Kabul: 11.08.2024 · Published / Yayın Tarihi: 20.08.2024

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Cite this article as: Ercan S. From Past to Future: Türkiye in the Modern Olympic Games. *Turk J Sports Med.* 2024; Agu 20th; <https://doi.org/10.47447/tjism.0866>

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Games in 1932 and 1980. On the other hand, since 1984, Turkish athletes have consistently participated in both the Summer and Winter Olympic Games (5).

Looking at the last 100 years of the modern Olympics, it is evident that Türkiye, except for the years 1932 and 1980, has consistently participated in and valued this globally recognized sporting event. Over the years, the number of sports disciplines in which our country participates has increased and diversified. However, the number of medals and the success achieved have fluctuated over the years. In the 1936 Berlin Summer Olympic Games, Türkiye won its first Olympic medals. This achievement belongs to the wrestlers Yaşar Erkan, who secured a gold medal in Greco-Roman wrestling (61 kg), and Ahmet Kireççi, who earned a bronze medal in freestyle wrestling (79 kg). In terms of medal success, 1960 (7 gold medals, 2 silver medals) and 2020 (2 gold medals, 2 silver medals, 9 bronze medals) stand out as the years with the most gold medals and the most total medals, respectively (17).

In conclusion, significant developments stand out in Türkiye's journey of Modern Olympic Game history, from the Paris 1924 Olympics to the Paris 2024 Olympics. It is evident that systematic preparations based on scientific data are necessary for optimal performance and health of athletes. Proper national strategies and improved infrastructure for Olympic sports will definitely increase and stabilize success in Olympic Games.

Note: In the references of letters to the Editor, the abbreviation BCA stands for the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of State Archives Republican Archives, and BOA stands for the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of State Archives Ottoman Archives. The dates (with calendars type such as Gregorian or Hijri) and locations of the documents (fond, box, folder, sequence) are provided side by side in the references.

Ethics Committee Approval / Etik Komite Onayı

Ethics committee permission is not required for the Letter to the Editor, which is the report of the study conducted between August 2021 and August 2024, due to its scope.

Conflict of Interest / Çıkar Çatışması

The author declared no conflicts of interest with respect to authorship and/or publication of the article.

Financial Disclosure / Finansal Destek

The author received no financial support for the research and/or publication of this article.

Author Contributions / Yazar Katkıları

The tasks of Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal Analysis, and Writing - Original Draft were all carried out by the corresponding author, Sabriye Ercan

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