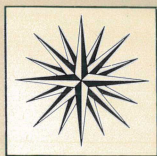


Beyond Sports



5 Rings, 1 Flame



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An Emblem and a Symbol

Throughout history, fire has played an important role in man's daily life; so it was perhaps not surprising that the symbol of the flame should have come to mind when it was decided to reintroduce the Olympic Games after a long eclipse. Just as fire will continue to smoulder unseen beneath the ashes, so the spirit of the Olympic Games burned steadily on, unremarked, across the centuries.

It was not until 1928 that the flame was finally relit in the Olympic Stadium in Amsterdam, but a decision to adopt this symbol had been made three years earlier in Prague by the Olympic Congress. The words spoken at the meeting are still used, in a modified form, at the closing ceremony of each Olympic Games: "May [...] the olympic flame burn across the ages, for the good of all mankind, with ever greater enthusiasm, loyalty and fervor."

In 1936, the year of the Berlin Olympic Games, the German Carl Diem put forward the idea of using relays of runners to carry the flame directly from Olympia. At the same time, members of the IOC, who were in session in Athens, paid a visit to the

plane trees at Teghea and decided that the flame should be lit as it used to be in that very spot by the Ancient Greeks: a piece of wood should be laid on the bowl of a concave mirror and exposed to sunlight till it caught fire. Pierre de Coubertin, the leading spirit behind the reintroduction of the Olympic Games, seized on this suggestion with joy and incorporated it into his beautiful "message to the Olympia-Berlin runners", one of his last speeches before his death in 1937.

Since that day, the flame has crossed mountains, plains and oceans, borne by several thousand athletes, both famous and anonymous. At the Winter Olympics in Oslo, in 1952, the flame was lit not in Olympia, but at the home of Norway's first ski-jump champion, Sondre Nordheim. In 1976, the flame was lit simultaneously in Olympia and Montreal by means of a laser beam. Anyone who has seen the flame-bearer running through the open countryside, has been moved by an emotion born of the fraternal bond that exists between mankind.

The flame which every four years reanimates the world's sporting communities