

Antwerp 1920 Olympic Games

WRITTEN BY: The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica

Alternative Title: Games of the VII Olympiad

Antwerp 1920 Olympic Games, athletic festival held in Antwerp, Belg., that took place April 20–Sept. 12, 1920. The Antwerp Games were the sixth occurrence of the modern Olympic Games.

The 1920 Olympics were awarded to Antwerp in hopes of bringing a spirit of renewal to Belgium, which had been devastated during World War I. The defeated countries—Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey—were not invited. The new Soviet Union chose not to attend.

The city, plagued by bad weather and economic woes, had a very short time to clean up the rubble left by the war and construct new facilities for the Games. The athletics stadium was unfinished when the Games began, and athletes were housed in crowded rooms furnished with folding cots. The events were lightly attended, as few could afford tickets. In the final days, the stands were filled with schoolchildren who were given free admittance.

The Olympic flag was introduced at the Antwerp Games. More than 2,600 athletes (including more than 60 women) participated in the Games, representing 29 countries. The highlight of the track-and-field competition was the running of Paavo Nurmi of Finland, who battled Joseph Guillemot of France and won three of his nine career gold medals—in the 10,000-metre run, the 10,000-metre cross-country individual race, and the cross-country team race. In the 5,000-metre run he finished second to Guillemot (see Sidebar: Joseph Guillemot: Life After War). The Finnish team gave a historic performance, gaining nine gold medals in athletics, one fewer than the U.S. team, which had traditionally dominated the sport.

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Italian fencer Nedo Nadi won five gold medals, including individual titles in foil and sabre. The swimming and diving events starred Americans Duke Paoa Kahanamoku (two golds), Ethelda Bleibtrey (three golds), and Aileen Riggan, who at age 14 won the gold medal in springboard diving.

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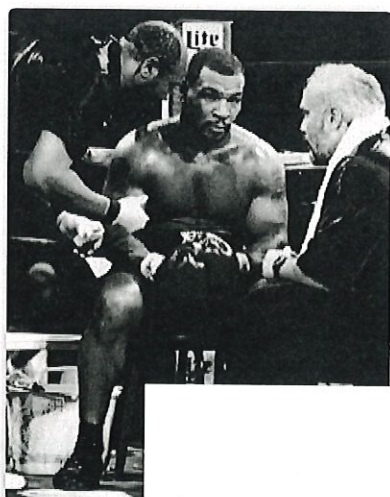
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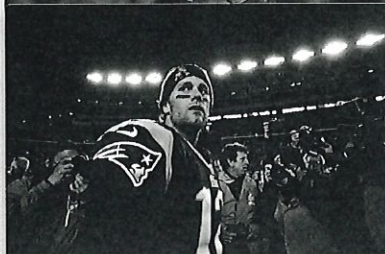
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