THE GAMES BEGIN

In 1894, French educator and athletic enthusiast Baron Pierre de Coubertin hosted a meeting of representatives from nine countries at which he called for a modern revival of the ancient Olympic Games. Embracing the motto Citius, Altius, Fortius (Faster, Higher, Stronger), de Coubertin championed the idea of an Olympics celebrating amateur athletics and the love of sport.

AN INTERNATIONAL EVENT

De Coubertin saw the potential for the Olympics to promote international goodwill through both open competition and cultural exchange. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) was created to organize the first modern Olympic Games in Athens, Greece in the summer of 1896. Summer Olympics have been held every four years since 1896 – with the exception of the war years – and in 1924 the IOC added the Winter Games.

SPORT & NATION BUILDING

Within modern nation states, there were different attitudes towards physical activity. In Germany, Friedrich Jahn (1778-1852) saw gymnastics as a way for German boys and men to develop personal strength in order to strengthen nationalism. In Great Britain, educators and social reformers saw competitive sports as the way to toughen their males and teach fair play. In the first decades of the 20th century, and particularly after the First World War (1914-1918), competitive sports became more popular than gymnastics in Europe, North America and parts of Asia.
SPORT IN CANADA

“To strengthen the body is to improve the vehicle of almost all our activity, and to strengthen the bodies of the nation is to strengthen the nation.”
- Henry Roxborough, Canadian author and supporter of amateur sport, 1925

Olympic supporters argued for well-ordered and regulated Games promoting competition and self-improvement. Canadians created national associations for their favorite sports. The Amateur Athletic Union of Canada was the largest of these organizations, in charge of track and field, gymnastics, handball, fencing, boxing and wrestling.

JEWS & SPORTS

“A healthy self-reliant and self-respecting Jewish generation will add credit to our community, to our city and to our country.”
- One of the justifications for the Young Men’s and Young Women’s Hebrew Association of Toronto, 1925.

As with their non-Jewish counterparts, individual Jewish athletes have challenged themselves to excel in their chosen sport. Success in sports could mean recognition in both the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds. By participating in athletics, Jews were also challenging stereotypes of Jews and Jewish bodies as “weak,” “nervous,” “feminine” and “ugly.”

CHALLENGES TO THE OLYMPICS

Between the First and Second World Wars, the political left - socialists and communists - charged governments with using Olympic competition to claim a place for their nation on the international scene, or to prove the strength of their nation to both friend and foe. Critics believed that many of the national sports organizations and the IOC promoted the interests of the upper and middle classes. They responded by creating alternative sporting associations and competitions such as the Red Sport International and the Workers’ Olympics.

FROM AMATEUR TO PROFESSIONAL

The Olympics were conceived as a competition for amateur athletes who did not earn money or receive endorsements for their participation. Amateur athletes who competed against professionals or accepted endorsements could be disqualified. With the growth of professional sports, this began to change. In 1986, the IOC allowed professional athletes to participate in the Games.

**Nationalism:** devotion and loyalty to one’s nation.

- Collection of Anna Yanovsky
The text below is from a petition that was addressed to Prime Minister Richard Bennett by S. W. Jacobs, the President of the Canadian Jewish Congress, and published in the Jewish Western Bulletin, a Vancouver-based Jewish newspaper, on August 22, 1935. The petition was accompanied by a memorandum listing 69 cases of discrimination and violence under the Nazi regime.

“Our country [Canada] has traditionally recognized its moral and legal rights, as well as its duty to speak on the behalf of those persecuted for their religious beliefs and for minority groups or races derived of their just rights.”

“In light of the humanitarian traditions by which our Government has been guided; in light of the danger to world peace, and to democratic institutions of government in this unleashing of barbarism and race hatred, and of the threat to Canadian citizens who are Jews, that is explicit in the policy of the German Government of organizing attacks upon, and denying the rights of all Jews in Germany, we respectfully call upon the Government of Canada to protest against the racial and religious persecution that now prevail in Germany, and to take every step consistent with international practice to inform the German Government of the outraged sentiments of the Canadian people.”

“We are confident that in expressing these views, our Government will speak not only for the thousands of our brethren in this country, but for all Canadians, of all races and creeds, who have given, repeatedly, evidence of their horror of oppression and of their concern for the preservation of the fundamental rights of civilized humanity.”
The text below is an excerpt from an opinion piece by Ted Reeves, a sports columnist and coach of the Queens University football team, published in the Evening Telegram on October 29, 1935.

“It may be that [...] Jews may be given the worst of it at the Berlin Olympic Games, although we do not think such will be the case. [...] To be an Olympic winner or contender, a man must have great ability, he must almost live for the sport at which he excels, he must have ambition to become the best at his athletic specialty and the courage of a real competitor.

[...]

“It is very well to say that the real spirit of sportsmanship is not in the narrow-minded hopped-up Germany of today. But what is real sportsmanship? Our notion of a sportsman is a bloke who does his best every time he pulls on his sweater and who can give or take his bumps without crying too much. Maybe other people have other definitions, but we think that any good athlete believing he has a chance to win an Olympic title and having the ambition to do so, who lets the threats of a little trouble in Berlin keep him away from the Olympic Games, well, he doesn’t rate as champion no matter how fast he can run or how high he can jump.”