OLYMPIC REVIEW TAKES A LOOK AT HOW THE IOC IS WORKING TO EVOLVE THE OLYMPIC GAMES FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF ATHLETES AND FANS

GENERATION GAMES
Urban sports like 3x3 basketball have been added to the Olympic programme to appeal to youth.
Olympic sport today looks very different to when the Games were revived by Pierre de Coubertin at the end of the 19th century. The competitors are fitter and stronger. The equipment and venues are more technologically advanced. And gone are events such as tug of war and underwater swimming, replaced by modern, youthful disciplines like BMX and 3x3 basketball.

Athletes still strive for those coveted gold, silver and bronze medals, but now they are watched by billions of people around the world, on a multitude of devices, and the constant evolution of Olympic sport has been necessary to ensure that those eyeballs remain focused on the Summer and Winter Games for 16 days every two years.

“The pace of change continues to accelerate in both sport and society,” explains Franco Carraro, the chair of the Olympic Programme Commission, “but the construction of the Olympic programme continues to find a balance between the traditional forms of sport and those newer sports that are growing in popularity and reaching out to new audiences.”

The most recent changes to the Olympic programme were announced in July this year, with the addition of innovative and exciting new events for the Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022, including monobob and freestyle ski big air.

“These changes reflect what has proved to be both popular and practised around the world,” says Carraro. “Many of the new events reflect the changing nature of society, the changing nature of technology, and the changing role of sport within wider society. The Olympic programme is still focused on the world’s greatest athletes performing on the world’s greatest sporting stage, in the world’s most popular and highest profile sports. But obviously the composition of those sports has changed over the last 120 years.”

Perhaps one of the most significant trends has been the emergence of urban sports and adapted formats, with the likes of BMX freestyle park, skateboarding and 3x3 basketball all set to make their debut on the Olympic programme at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020. According to Carraro, these changes to sport are inevitable due to the increasing numbers of people living in urban settings around the world.

“The changes to the Tokyo 2020 event programme reflect the changing nature of sport and the changing structures of sport,” he explains. “We’re seeing more urban sport. We’re seeing more adapted or shortened formats. These reflect the changes in society,
The overall global urbanisation of populations and, therefore, the changes in the ways that they can access sports facilities and experience sport."

While many of these emerging events and formats are new to the Olympic Games, they have already been seen at previous editions of the Youth Olympic Games (YOG). Monobob, for instance, first appeared at Lillehammer 2016, while 3x3 basketball has been on the YOG programme since Singapore 2010 and BMX freestyle park will make its debut at Buenos Aires 2018 this October.

This use of the YOG as a platform to test and validate new sport formats has now become one of the key strategic goals for the IOC, which hopes to enhance the YOG’s role as “an incubator for innovation”.

“The Youth Olympic Games reflect wider trends in sport,” explains Carraro, “such as the urbanisation of certain formats of sport, or shorter, more youth-focused forms of team sports. We now have 13 events that have come through from the YOG to inclusion in the Olympic Games, thanks to the increased flexibility we have around the Olympic programme on a Games-to-Games basis.

“So the YOG does provide a testing ground for us, and that’s not only important for the Olympic programme, but it’s also important in terms of the sports themselves, by providing an opportunity, and a showcase, for these new formats.”

Alongside urbanised and more youthful formats, the YOG has also led the way with innovative mixed gender
The IOC has increased the number of mixed gender events at the Games. At Tokyo 2020, for instance, there will be 18 mixed events – twice as many as Rio 2016 – while Beijing 2022 will feature new mixed events in short track speed skating, ski jumping, aerials and snowboard cross. The inclusion of these mixed events is a significant step towards achieving the 50 per cent gender balance at the Olympic Games and Olympic Winter Games for both athletes and events, which is a clear objective of Olympic Agenda 2020. It is also another concrete example of how the Games continue to lead the way in promoting gender equality in sport.

Ever since female athletes first competed in Paris in 1900 – before women had even been granted the right to vote in most countries around the world – the Olympic Games have played a key role in breaking down gender barriers. According to Carraro, the ever-increasing participation of women at the Games has been one of the most important developments over the last 50 years and the milestone of full gender parity is a key target for the future.

“‘We know every opportunity we provide for women in the Olympic Games has a flow-on impact for the promotion of gender equality and the opportunities that are given to female athletes around the world.”’

Franco Carraro, Olympic Programme Commission

Above
The IOC has increased the number of mixed gender events at the Games.

Above right
Women first competed at the Olympic Games in 1900, in sports such as golf, tennis and sailing.

Right
A young kitesurfer in action at a YOG qualifying event.

in Tokyo (48.8 per cent) and Beijing (45.4 per cent), but the YOG will once again lead the way with full gender parity already achieved at Buenos Aires 2018 and the upcoming Winter YOG Lausanne 2020. For Carraro, this milestone will also have a further impact beyond the Games.

“It’s not just a statistic, because we know that every opportunity we provide for women in the Olympic Games has a flow-on impact for the promotion of gender equality and the opportunities that are given to female athletes around the world,” he says. “It influences increased quotas for women in other sporting events and leads to further investment in women’s sport at a national level. Equally the mixed events underline our approach by showcasing male and female athletes at the same level, in the same type of events, and competing as equals.”

In addition to paving the way for gender equality and providing a taste of what future Olympic sports programmes may look like, the YOG also offers a chance for fans to get a first glimpse of the next generation of sporting talent.

“We have already seen the importance of the YOG as a pathway to the Olympic Games,” says Carraro. “At Rio 2016, for example, we had over
500 athletes who had previously competed in the YOG, across a wide range of sports and NOCs.”

There will be 4,000 more young athletes aiming to begin a similar journey to the Olympic Games in Buenos Aires this October, but what will the Games of the future look like when they make it there?

According to John Coates, chair of the Executive Steering Committee for the “New Norm” and of the Coordination Commission for the Games of the XXXII Olympiad Tokyo 2020, among the most significant changes will be an increased flexibility for host cities, greater assistance from the IOC and the wider Olympic Movement, and an overall reduction in the costs and complexities of delivering the Games.

“From an organiser’s standpoint, the Games of the future will definitely be easier to organise,” he explains.

“There will be strong collaboration with the Olympic Movement – from National Olympic Committees, the International Federations, the IOC – and there will be less pressure in the first three years of organisation.”

These goals will be achieved through the implementation of the “New Norm” – a set of 118 reforms, announced in February this year, that reimagine how the Games are delivered.

“This is the practical implementation of Olympic Agenda 2020 and how it relates to the Games,” explains Coates. “The 118 measures each point to savings that can be made in organising the Games and cover everything from reducing venue sizes and rethinking transport options to optimising...
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existing infrastructure and reusing venues for various sports. If you deliver these solutions, it means reducing the complexity for organisers, reducing financial pressures and reducing the cost of Games organisation.”

But despite all these cost-saving measures, athletes can be sure that the Games of the future will still remain at the pinnacle of sport.

“We have to contain the costs of organising the Games but, at the same time, constantly adapt, evolve and widen the scope,” reveals Coates.

“You wouldn’t expect the Games to be anything other than at the very top in every single area, so you have to be excellent from a governance standpoint, you have to be perfect from an environmental standpoint, you have to have sport at its best, you have to have the entertainment factor at the top, hospitality has to be great. You cannot have any glitches when it comes to technology. This is the pressure we are operating under; the expectation on the organisers and us is perfection and excellence, nothing else. We have to constantly impress.”

So just how will the Games continue to impress fans around the world in the future?

“When it comes to the events themselves, one aspect that will continue to evolve is the venues,” says Coates. “They will become more than just sporting venues and offer a much wider experience for spectators by integrating more and more services and more and more sophistication in terms
Above
Paris 2024 will reduce costs by using a compact venue plan

Clockwise from left
The IOC has been embracing and exploring modern trends such as augmented reality, sport climbing and esports of hospitality and technology. So the venue of the future will offer a much more immersive experience.

“This is important as we have to constantly strive to make the experience of the Olympic Games unique for everybody. It is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for many people. So the sports presentation will also evolve to become even more spectacular as well. There will be more digital integration, so not only will you be able to watch what happens live, but you will also have access to all the analytics through developments such as augmented reality. A lot will evolve in the near future and, if it evolves for the Games, it will evolve for sport in general.”

With augmented reality in the stands and more urban, youthful sports on the field of play, the Games of the future may look very different to those revived by Coubertin at the end of the 19th century. But, according to Coates, at their core they will always retain the fundamental principles that Coubertin held dear, acting as a platform to promote the values of sport, the values of Olympism, and the goals of the Olympic Movement.

“The Olympic Games are unique and they will remain unique,” says Coates. “They are greater than the event itself because they carry all these values, and the power of that original vision still means a lot to the athletes and everyone involved in the Olympic Movement. Everything else evolves to embrace new trends because we need to maintain relevance and adapt to society in general, but we are still inspiring young people around the world to excel through the performances of the athletes. And it is a marvellous future that we have because the intention is for it to remain this way.”

IN THE NEXT ISSUE: We look back at the first-ever Olympism in Action Forum, organised ahead of the Youth Olympic Games Buenos Aires 2018 and intended to bring the Olympic Movement together with the broader public to discuss how to build a better world through sport.
ESPORTS FORUM BREAKS NEW GROUND

For a striking example of the evolution in the ways that sports events are being organised, distributed and consumed, the phenomenal rise of esports cannot be ignored.

With surging viewing figures, exciting events featuring a live audience, and esports players building their own personal brands, interest in esports is expected to grow exponentially over the coming years. The Olympic Movement is looking at the role that it could play alongside and in conjunction with traditional sports.

In acknowledgment of this, on 21 July the IOC and the GAISF hosted an Esports Forum at the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, where more than 150 representatives from the esports and gaming community and the Olympic Movement met to discuss the possibilities for future cooperation and engagement.

The historic meeting saw esports players, publishers and sponsors, along with athletes and key figures from the Olympic community, gather for a productive day of panel discussions, interactive demonstrations and networking opportunities. Among the notable participants were IOC President Thomas Bach, GAISF President Patrick Baumann, former professional basketball player and present-day esports franchise owner Rick Fox, who moderated the event, plus some of the world’s best esports players.

“One thing in particular was clear from these fascinating discussions – we are united by passion and a shared love of competition,” said Baumann, capturing the sense of optimism at the forum. “That’s a positive starting point for further discussions and possible future cooperation.”

IOC Sports Director Kit McConnell added: “While the goal was not to develop a pathway towards the inclusion of esports on the Olympic programme, we have a strong plan for ongoing dialogue and engagement,

Pictured
Esports has been growing in popularity around the world.
and are in a strong position to coordinate and support the wider engagement of the Olympic Movement with esports.

From presentations by industry members to roundtable discussions between athletes and gamers, it became increasingly clear that both communities share a great deal of common ground, including a shared passion for their activities. There is also significant scope for both to learn from and benefit the other.

Other topics of discussion included gender equality across all sports, the role of media and broadcasting in reaching audiences, attracting external investors, and comparisons of athletes' and esports players' routines and experiences.

Dario “TLO” Wünsch, a professional StarCraft II player who participated in “The Athlete Perspective” debate, explained: “Just like Olympians do, it’s just about trying to excel at a skill in a competitive environment, be a role model to young people and present your competition in a positive light.”

To continue the development of the partnership, the IOC and GAISF have established an Esports Liaison Group, which President Bach has invited to give a presentation at the Olympism in Action Forum in Buenos Aires in October.

“There will be a great opportunity to make everybody more familiar with esports, so we can make the issues, passions and the drive for excellence we share more visible to the wider public,” said the IOC President.

Also highlighted was the significance of the presence in Buenos Aires of the 4,000 young athletes who will be competing at the YOG. They are the generation of athletes best placed to articulate and explore the relationship between traditional sports and esports, and the future of collaboration between the two is an exciting prospect.

As Fox said: “We’ve seen with sports being added to the Olympic roster that different generations’ focuses grow the attention around certain sports.

“I think sport and technology will continue to converge in ways we can’t even envision today… and I think the next generation will define that for us.”