



OLYMPIC GAMES



CORTINA D'AMPEZZO
January 26 - February 5, 1956



Cortina... at last...

The 1956 Winter Olympics, officially known as the VII Olympic Winter Games (Italian: *VII Giochi olimpici invernali*), were celebrated in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy. This celebration of the Games was held from 26 January to 5 February 1956. Cortina, which had originally been awarded the 1944 Winter Olympics, beat out Montreal, Colorado Springs and Lake Placid for the right to host the 1956 Games. The Cortina Games were unique in that many of the venues were within walking distance of each other. The organising committee received financial support from the Italian government for infrastructure improvements, but the rest of the costs for the Games had to be privately financed. Consequently, the organising committee was the first to rely heavily on corporate sponsorship for funding.

32 nations — the largest number of participating Winter Olympic countries to that point — competed in the four sports and twenty-four events. Austrian Toni Sailer became the first person to sweep all three alpine skiing events in a single Olympics. The figure skating competition was held outdoors for the last time at these Games. Logistically, the only problem encountered was a lack of snow at the alpine skiing events. To remedy this, the Italian army transported large amounts of snow to ensure the courses were adequately covered.

Politics did not impact the 1956 Winter Games as at the Summer Games in Melbourne, Australia, where the Soviet response to the Hungarian Uprising and the Suez War caused many nations to boycott the Games. The Cortina Olympics were the first Winter Olympics televised to a multi-national audience. These were the first Olympic Games under the IOC Presidency of Avery Brundage.

Cortina d'Ampezzo is a ski resort village situated in the Dolomite Alps in the north-eastern corner of Italy. In 1956, it had a population of 6,500 people. Count Alberto Bonacossa, an accomplished alpine skier, figure skater and a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) since 1925, spearheaded the effort to bring the Olympic Games to Cortina d'Ampezzo. He persuaded the city council of Cortina to bid for the 1944 Games. During the 38th IOC Congress held in London in 1939, Cortina d'Ampezzo was awarded the 1944 Winter Olympics, but the Games were canceled due to the outbreak of World War II.

The Cold War began after the allied victory in World War II. Until 1952, many of the Communist countries of Eastern Europe had participated in Worker's Olympics or Spartakiads. The Soviet Union emerged from international isolation by eschewing the Spartakiad and participating in the 1952 Summer Olympics in Helsinki; they made their Winter Olympics debut at the Cortina Games. Soviet general secretary Nikita Khrushchev's aim was to use international sports competitions, such as the Olympics, to demonstrate the superiority of Communism, strengthen political ties with other Communist countries, and project the Soviet Union as a peace-loving nation actively engaged in the world. The Soviets' participation at the Olympics raised the level of competition as they won the most medals and more gold medals than any other nation. The Cortina Games were held before the Hungarian uprising, and the Suez War, which occurred in the autumn of 1956; the Winter Games escaped the boycotts that plagued the Melbourne Olympics, which were celebrated in November and December of that year.



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SPORTS

Medals were awarded in 24 events contested in 4 sports (8 disciplines). The programme for the 1956 Winter Games saw two new events added to the four sports and twenty-two events from the 1952 Olympics, namely the men's 30 kilometre cross-country ski race and the women's 3x5 kilometre cross-country relay race. The Soviet Union requested the inclusion of a women's speed skating event (due to their success in the event), but this was rejected by the IOC at the 49th Session in Athens in 1954.

*Bobsleigh (2 events)

*Ice hockey (1 event)

*Skating:

Figure skating (3 events)

Speed skating (4 events)

*Skiing:

Alpine skiing (8 events)

Nordic skiing:

Cross-country skiing (6 events)

Nordic combined (1 event)

Ski jumping (1 event)

The opening ceremonies took place on Thursday, 26 January 1956 in the Olympic Ice Stadium. Temporary seating was added to boost the stadium's capacity to 14,000 people. Athletes representing 32 nations marched in the ceremony and Mr Giovanni Gronchi, President of the Italian Republic, declared the Games open. At this point, speed skater Guido Caroli skated into the stadium with the Olympic flame. While he was on a circuit of the Ice Stadium he tripped and fell over a television cable; he regained his feet and lit the cauldron. The Olympic oath was delivered by Giuliana Chenal-Minuzzo; this was **the first time a female athlete gave the oath at an Olympic Games** The **Olympic Hymn**, officially recognised as such at the IOC congress in Paris on 13 June 1955, **was played for the first time at the Cortina Games.**

The Cortina Games were the first Winter Olympics to be broadcast to a multi-national audience. Television as a mass communication technology was expanding rapidly in the 1950s. In the midst of the Cold War, Europe was a propaganda battlefield as countries relayed television signals across the Iron Curtain. By 1956, countries in the Soviet sphere of influence had achieved a technological advantage and were able to broadcast Communist television programmes into Finland, the eastern border regions and more isolated geographic areas of West Germany and Austria, where residents had coverage from an East German broadcast with a pro-Communist point-of-view. Most West Germans watched the 1956 Winter Olympics via Eurovision broadcasts which were relayed all over western Europe including all major West German stations (Eurovision connectivity in 1956) The political ramifications were not the only impact television had these Olympics. The Cortina Games did not generate revenue from television - the 1960 Winter Olympics in Squaw Valley were the first to do so but were an experiment in the feasibility of televising a large multi-sport event. For the first time at an Olympic Games, the venues were built with television in mind. For example, the grand stand at the cross-country ski venue (*Lo Stadio della neve*) was built facing south so that the television cameras would not be adversely affected by the rising or setting sun.

Venues

VENUE	SPORTS
Apollonio Stadium	Ice hockey
Pista Olimpica di Bob – Eugenio Monti	Bobsleigh
La pista di Misurina	Speed skating
Stadio Olimpico Del Ghiaccio	Figure skating / ice hockey
Lo Stadio della neve	Nordic combined / Cross-country skiing
Mount Faloria (Illio Colli Run)	Alpine skiing
Mount Tofana di Mezzo (Olympia Run)	Alpine skiing
Mount Tofana di Mezzo (Canalone Run)	Alpine skiing
Col Druscié	Alpine skiing
Trampolino Olimpico Italia	Ski jumping / Nordic combined

HIGHLIGHTS

































*The Soviets won all their games to claim their first Olympic title, their second World title, and their third European title. Canada, represented by the Kitchener-Waterloo Dutchmen, won its eighth consecutive Olympic ice hockey medal, and first bronze medal. The victory of the Soviet team was particularly noteworthy given the fact that they only began competing internationally in 1954.

*Chiharu Igaya won the first Winter Olympics medal for Japan when he placed second in the slalom.

*Toni Sailer of Austria swept the men's gold medals, becoming the first person to win three alpine skiing golds in a single Olympics.

*Franciszek Gašienica Groń was the first Polish athlete to win the Olympic medal in winter.

A total of 32 nations sent athletes to Cortina d'Ampezzo. Along with the Soviet Union, Bolivia and Iran competed at the Winter Games for the first time, making Bolivia the first completely Tropical nation to participate in a Winter Olympic. Korea, Liechtenstein, and Turkey returned after having missed the 1952 Winter Olympics, while Argentina, Denmark, New Zealand, and Portugal did not compete at these Games after having participated in the previous edition. Athletes from West Germany (FRG) and East Germany (GDR) competed together as the United Team of Germany, an arrangement that would continue for the following two Olympiads.

NATION	PARTICIPANTS	NATION	PARTICIPANTS
AUSTRALIA 	10	ITALY 	79
AUSTRIA 	66	JAPAN 	10
BELGIUM 	6	LEBANON 	3
BOLIVIA 	1	LIECHTENSTEIN 	8
BULGARIA 	7	NETHERLANDS 	8
CANADA 	37	NORWAY 	51
CHILE 	4	POLAND 	53
CZECHOSLOVAKIA 	41	ROMANIA 	20
FINLAND 	34	SOUTH KOREA 	4
FRANCE 	37	SOVIET UNION 	67
UNITED TEAM OF GERMANY 	75	SPAIN 	14
GREAT BRITAIN 	45	SWEDEN 	68
GREECE 	3	SWITZERLAND 	61
HUNGARY 	2	TURKEY 	6
ICELAND 	8	UNITED STATES 	74
IRAN 	4	YUGOSLAVIA 	18

POLISH PARTICIPATION

There were 51 athletes from Poland (44 men, 7 women) in 6 sports. For the first time, Poland participated in bobsleigh competition

BRONZE MEDAL:

Franciszek Gąsienica Groń – nordic combined

OTHER NOTABLE RESULTS:

5th – Women's 3x5km relay (cross-country skiing): Maria Gąsienica Bukowa-Kowalska, Józefa Czerniawska-Pęksa, Zofia Krzeptowska

8th – ice hockey team (Władysław Pabisz, Edward Kocząb, Janusz Zawadzki, Kazimierz Chodakowski, Stanisław Olczyk, Mieczysław Chmura, Henryk Bromowicz, Józef Kurek, Zdzisław Nowak, Szymon Janiczko, Adolf Wróbel, Kazimierz Bryniarski, Marian Herda, Hilary Skrzyński, Bronisław Gosztyła, Rudolf Czech, Alfred Wróbel)

Results: USA 0:4; Czechoslovakia 3:8; Switzerland 6:2; Austria 4:3; Italy 2:5

9th – Men's 4x10km relay (cross-country skiing): Józef Rubiś, Józef Gąsienica Sobczak, Tadeusz Kwapień, Andrzej Mateja



Franciszek Gąsienica Groń (1931 – 2014) – he was the first Polish medalist of winter olympics. He was the third in nordic combined. He had a bad start in the olympic competition – he was the last one after the first jump, later on he managed to move to 10th place. The next day, during 15 km cross-country run, he lost about seven seconds as he fell down when trying to go past an Italian athlete lying on the snow. However, he was successful to win the bronze medal. He lost only four seconds to the second place. For his achievement, in Poland he was granted a voucher for a motorcycle. In 1957 he had really serious injuries but he managed to recover and to start successfully in the following years.



Medal count

RANK	NATION	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE	TOTAL
1.	SOVIET UNION	7	3	6	16
2.	AUSTRIA	4	3	4	11
3.	FINLAND	3	3	1	7
4.	SWITZERLAND	3	2	1	6
5.	SWEDEN	2	4	4	10
6.	UNITED STATES	2	3	2	7
7.	NORWAY	2	1	1	4
8.	ITALY	1	2	0	3
9.	UNITED TEAM OF GERMANY	1	0	1	2
10.	CANADA	0	1	2	3
11.	JAPAN	0	1	0	1
12.	HUNGARY	0	0	1	1
	POLAND	0	0	1	1
		25	23	24	72

MAJOR STARS

Vsevolod Bobrov (USSR) - gold medalist in ice hockey; he is considered on the best Russians ever in ice hockey, football and bandy (photo below)

Jevgeny Grishin (USSR) - two gold medals in speed skating

Toni Sailer (Austria) - absolutely dominated alpine skiing - he won three gold medals (photo on the right)

Veikko Hakulinen (Finland) - one gold and two silvers in cross-country skiing (added to one gold from Oslo)

Sixten Jernberg (Sweden) - one gold, two silvers and one bronze in cross-country skiing

Pavel Kolchin (USSR) - one gold and two bronzes in cross-country skiing

