



MULTICULTURAL MOMENTS

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Inclusivity and the Olympic Games

Olympic events highlight athletic skills, perseverance, and triumph. The current pandemic added another layer of challenge to the games as athletes had to adapt in many ways. But the Tokyo Olympics had an additional highlight—one of inclusion. This issue of Multicultural Moments presents a few examples.

Gender Representation: The Tokyo Olympics is said to be the most gender-balanced in history as women represented 49% of participating athletes according to the International Olympic Committee (IOC)—<https://olympics.com/tokyo-2020/en/news/tokyo-2020-first-ever-gender-balanced-games-record-number-of-competitors-para>.

- **Gender requirements.** For the Tokyo Games, the IOC's Executive Board required for the first time that each nation designate a man and woman flag bearer for the opening ceremonies: <https://olympics.com/tokyo-2020/en/news/ioc-sends-extremely-strong-message-that-gender-balance-is-a-reality-at-the-olymp>.
- **Mixed-sex events.** Only a handful of Olympic events are considered "True Mixed Sex" events, meaning men and women compete against each other. Equestrian events are one example of a "True Mixed-Sex" event. At the Tokyo games, German rider [Julia Krajenski](#) became the first woman to capture an individual gold medal in equestrian eventing when she and her horse completed the last of three eventing components.
- **LBGTQ representation:** More than 180 openly LGBTQ athletes participated in the Tokyo Games, which is three times the number from the 2016 Rio games. These athletes represented at least 30 nations and more than 30 sports, with women's soccer having the most. <https://www.outsports.com/olympics/2021/7/12/22565574/tokyo-summer-olympics-lgbtq-gay-athletes-list>

Youth Representation. With the addition of new events such as rock climbing and skateboarding, the Olympics is drawing more youth athletes, and youth athletes are excelling in other sports as well.

- **Skateboarding.** New to the summer Olympics, skateboarding is one of several events with no minimum age requirement, which allowed younger athletes to compete and dominate in the sport. Gold and silver medals for the women's street event went to 13-year-olds (Japan's Momiji Nishiya and Brazil's Rayssa Leal) with a 16-year-old winning bronze. <https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/sports/tokyo-summer-olympics/these-are-the-youngest-and-oldest-athletes-competing-in-the-tokyo-olympics/2582130/>
- **Diving:** 14-year-old Chinese diver, Quan Hongchan, won a gold medal in women's diving and earned perfect ten scores for two of her five dives. Had the Olympics been held in 2020, she would have been too young to qualify to compete. <https://sports.yahoo.com/14-year-old-quan-hongchan-scores-2-perfect-10-s-in-historic-gold-medal-diving-performance-082004573.html>

- **Table tennis:** 12-year-old Hend Zaza of Syria was this year's youngest Olympian. While she didn't advance beyond the first round, she is the youngest Olympic competitor since the 1992 games. <https://www.npr.org/sections/tokyo-olympics-live-updates/2021/07/24/1020041846/a-12-year-old-syrian-makes-her-olympic-debut>

A Few Notable Firsts: It is common to hear of athletes breaking barriers in the Olympic games. Here are a few notable "firsts" from the Tokyo games:

- **Wrestling:** [Tamyra Mensah-Stock](#) became the first African American woman to capture a gold medal in an Olympic wrestling event.
- **Gymnastics:** Women's gymnastics saw several firsts, including U.S. gymnast [Sunisa Lee](#), who became the first Asian American woman to win a gold medal in the gymnastics individual all-around and the first Hmong American to win an Olympic gold medal in any sport. Brazil's [Rebeca Andrade](#) earned the nation's first-ever Olympic medal in gymnastics by capturing gold in the individual vault and silver in the individual all-around. When [Linoy Ashram](#) won the gold medal in the rhythmic gymnastics all-around competition, she became the first Israeli woman ever to win an Olympic gold medal.
- **Weightlifting:** [Polina Guryeva](#) put Turkmenistan on the Olympic map when she won a silver medal in women's weightlifting. Her victory was the first gold medal for the nation. [Hidilyn Diaz](#) of the Philippines won gold in the women's 55kg; it was her country's first gold medal in Olympic history for any sport or gender despite participating in the games for nearly a century. [Fares El-Bakh](#) won Qatar's first-ever gold medal by capturing the top prize in his weight class. See more examples of other firsts in the sport: <https://www.teamusa.org/USA-Weightlifting/Features/2021/August/10/Tokyo-Olympic-Weightlifting-Competition-Provides-Memorable-Firsts-For-A-Dozen-Nations>
- **Track and Field.** Representing Burkina Faso, [Hugues Fabrice Zango](#) won his nation's first-ever medal when he captured a bronze medal in the triple jump. [Flora Duffy](#) of Bermuda won the nation's first-ever gold medal in the women's triathlon.

Message of Unity. While most sports do not focus on creativity, artistic swimming (formerly synchronized swimming) recently changed its name to recognize the artistic skills that complement the technical elements. Spain's artistic swim team delivered a performance that incorporated Japanese sign language into their technical routine. While the team did not medal, their performance sent a message of unity and inclusivity. You can see a preview of the routine from the Olympic trials in Barcelona: <https://youtu.be/v67fEKuTuTk?t=19>.

May we avoid blaming or bias based on our circumstance and continue to be grateful for the gifts of the global community.

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