

# A HISTORY OF THE OLYMPICS

Written by **JOHN GOODBODY**

Read by **BARRY DAVIES**



Includes in-depth  
interview with  
Olympic gold medalist  
**Sebastian Coe**

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# A HISTORY OF THE OLYMPICS

## Some Favourite Olympic Moments

by Barry Davies

The Beijing Olympic Games will be my eleventh as a television commentator. All but the first, the Mexico Games in 1968 when I was employed by Independent Television, have been with the BBC. In all except Moscow in 1980 my commentaries have been on site. Then, the governing bodies of the sports on which I was due to commentate responded positively to the demand of the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher that Britain should follow the lead of the United States President Jimmy Carter and boycott the Games, because Soviet troops were occupying Afghanistan.

Happily, not everyone felt the need to employ sportsmen and women as some sort of front line, leaving Sebastian Coe, Steve Ovett and company to compete in Moscow, and me to work as the standby commentator in London, in case the far from reliable sound circuit of the time broke down. As a result, I was prepared for just about anything, with better immediate knowledge of what was happening than at any Games either before or since.

Many of the moments I most recall are included in this history of the Modern Games. Some I saw; most I viewed only after they had taken place – frustrating but inevitable with so much sport happening at the same time. In all I have commentated on over a third of the twenty-eight different sports, though only briefly on athletics, when I covered the start of the marathon in Mexico City live into ITN's *News at Ten*. As a foreword to your listening I offer some thoughts on what the Olympic Games mean to me, and three memories of the days when 'I was there.'

The Sognam Stadium in Seoul in 1988 housed my happiest memory – Great Britain's victory over West Germany in the final of the hockey tournament. It was, as

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the team's coach David Whitaker put it, 'a moment encapsulated in my life which will never disappear'. Paul Barber, a staunch defender and a fearsome striker of penalty corners, spoke of the greater satisfaction of being successful as a part-time sportsman (a somewhat old fashioned thought even then), but the fact that victory was gained by the professional approach of a team of amateurs added to its endearing charm.

In the demands made on gymnasts in countries behind the iron curtain, two teenagers – Elena Shushunova of the Soviet Union and Daniela Silivas of Romania – were professional in all but name. In Seoul they produced arguably the most intense head to head competition of any sport in the Games; a drama of expressions off and expertise on the four pieces of apparatus, in a battle to win the All-Around title. The faces of agony and ecstasy as Shushunova, the last to perform, vaulted to victory by 0.025 of a mark have remained in my sporting portrait gallery.

The victory four years later, in the Games in Barcelona, of a lass from a small village in Western Java was rather more clear-cut. A Roman Catholic from the world's biggest Muslim country, Susi Susanti became the first Indonesian to win an Olympic gold medal; and in a sport – badminton – that her country adores with a passion which has to be seen to be believed. Sitting in the commentary position alongside Craig Reddie, the chairman of the British Olympic Association and a member of the International Olympic Committee, who had striven to bring badminton to the Games, I saw clearly what the victory meant to her and to those in the audience from her country. Even the General who was the president of their badminton federation was awash with tears. When Susanti returned home with her then boyfriend, Budi Kusuma, who the next day won the men's title, a million people turned out in Jakarta to greet them.

My visits to the main Olympic stadia, other than as a spectator, have been to commentate on the men's football final and the ceremonies. The former usually offers up a name or two who will go on to make the headlines – Romario, who scored seven

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goals in '88, and Carlos Tevez, the scorer of eight last time in Athens, being two examples. The ceremonies produce the biggest television audiences of the Games, and give the commentator the most homework. More often than not they are at least one act and one specially-written song too long, but they are an integral part of the Olympic family get-together as each host city presents its history, its culture and its children – their past, present and future – built around the parade of the athletes taking part. While those competing on the opening day rarely take part, the experience for those who do offers a lifetime memory; guilt-edged if given the honour of carrying their nation's flag.

The entry of the Olympic flag, its interlocking rings on a plain, white background representing the five continents of the world joined in peace, excellence and sport is for me the most moving part of the protocol; its raising to the strains of the Olympic hymn, composed by Spiros Samaras, bringing a tingling feeling of inspiration. The electric atmosphere has caused many an oath-taker to succumb to nerves and forget his words. In Sydney the chosen judge failed to commit his colleagues to 'complete impartiality'. Most people would probably choose the final lighting of the Olympic cauldron which, leaving to one side the desperate moments of waiting endured by Cathy Freeman in the Millenium Games, was for me far more dramatic when just a single runner carried the torch around the stadium.

In its darkest hour – the Munich tragedy in 1972 in which eleven Israeli athletes lost their lives at the hands of the Black September group of Palestinian origin – the Olympic ideal could be viewed as a source of hope in an uncomprehending world. In spite of all humanity's imperfections, including those of its own members, I believe it remains so.

I trust you will enjoy John Goodbody's *History of the Olympics*.

**Barry Davies**

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# Some Favourite Olympic Moments

by John Goodbody

No sports event provides such a kaleidoscope of contrasting memories as the Olympic Games: the tiny gymnasts juxtaposed with the superheavyweight weightlifters; the speed of the sprinters with the endurance of the long-distance runners; the dexterity of the footballers and basketball players with the unremitting power of the wrestlers and judo fighters. Men and women, large and small: all have their place in the Games.

For anyone with a wide-ranging interest in sport, attending the Games can be a frustrating experience: one is able to see only a fraction of the events, almost all of which feature the world's most outstanding athletes. As it is, by devoting oneself to watching as many of the events as possible, one suffers a type of mental and physical indigestion at the end of the seventeen days. It takes me several weeks to recover from this feeling of being satiated with observing excellence.

I have reported on every Olympics, mainly for British newspapers, since 1968 and I am often asked which was my favourite. I find this difficult to answer. So much is bound up with the success of one's own work, and affected by the conditions of that work and by the performances of the competitors, especially those in the British team. Sydney and Barcelona are always held up by the British media as their favourite Games of the last forty years; but in the case of Sydney, in particular, this was because of the (partly unexpected) hoard of medals won by the British team. Probably the most adversely criticised Games during this period was Atlanta; but this was influenced by the fact that Britain only got one gold medal – it is always more rewarding to write about victories than trying to explain defeats, however narrow the latter may have been – while many journalists (although not me) had vexing experiences with the transport and communications in 1996.



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Both Moscow and Los Angeles were spoilt by the boycotts: the 1980 Games seemed grey and sombre, while 1984 was too garish (not surprising given its proximity to Hollywood). Neither was satisfactory. Munich was certainly the most dramatic, largely because of the killing of the Israeli athletes by Palestinian guerrillas, but also because of other, highly publicised, events and personalities.

I have fond memories of all the ten Summer Olympics that I have covered, although naturally of some more than others. My appreciation has also been influenced by my proximity to some of the competitors, whose careers usually climax at the Games. Like Barry Davies, I have selected three special occasions, all of which have been chosen because of the rapport which I, as a journalist, had established to a lesser or greater extent with the individuals concerned.

Chronologically, the first occasion was in Moscow in 1980. Twelve years earlier I had beaten (with considerable difficulty) a fifteen-year-old schoolboy in the London Area Judo Trials. This was Angelo Parisi, already more than 100 kilos, much of it across the chest, shoulders and width of his thighs. Holding him down was like lying on an earthquake. It was the only time I was to beat him; for several years, he used to hurl me round the Budokwai club in South Kensington, where we were both members. Although living in London, he held Italian nationality; but he switched to British citizenship, winning two European junior and two senior titles and an Olympic bronze medal by the age of 19. He then married a French girl and changed nationality again. When I went to work in Paris in 1978, Angelo was an established member of the French squad and again we saw much of each other. In Moscow he was picked for the heavyweight category, although he was light for the division. In the final he met Dimitar Zaprianov of Bulgaria. Angelo was losing with forty-five seconds left when he produced one of his textbook throws, uprooting his hapless opponent with a movement in which he got underneath Zaprianov and threw him over his back, falling on top of him with the effort. As the two men landed, the mat visibly bounced and the

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crowd rose to its feet in appreciation of a spectacular winning throw. As Angelo said to me afterwards: 'Je l'ai baisé', which roughly translated is 'I screwed him'. Indeed he did.

Four years later in Los Angeles, Seb Coe achieved successive Olympic victories in the 1,500 metres, something that no one had ever done before him. Recovering from illness, he had missed the key international races of the 1983 season, and there were doubts about whether he would ever recover his former eminence. I saw Seb win the Middlesex 800 metres title in Enfield in May 1984, and he was obviously making remarkable progress; but to retain his Olympic 1,500 metres would demand much from him, especially as his opponents included his compatriots Steve Ovett and Steve Cram – the World, European and Commonwealth champion. After finishing second in the 800 metres in Los Angeles, he was nicely placed in the back straight of the final of the 1,500 metres, following the pace of the Spaniard José Manuel Abascal. When Cram moved up to Seb's shoulder, the defending champion took off. Although Cram followed him, Coe had a lead of more than a metre as they entered the home straight. One waited for Cram's acceleration. It never came. Instead it was Seb who broke away, crossing the line as a clear winner. He then wheeled round towards the press box, his index finger outstretched, shouting: 'Who says I'm finished?' Underneath his amiable demeanour was the will of the champion that he was.

Fast-forward now to 2000 and a Saturday morning at the rowing course in Sydney. Steve Redgrave was attempting to be the first person in an endurance event ever to win gold medals in five successive Games. After their victories in Olympics and world championships in the coxless pairs, Redgrave and his partner Matthew Pinsent moved into a coxless four in 1997 and promptly won three more world titles, despite Steve himself being forced to take insulin for diabetes. However, in June 2000, the four only finished fourth at the Lucerne regatta. Under the guidance of their coach Jürgen Gröbler, they regrouped and came back fighting. At the final in Sydney, with

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Pinsent at stroke, they led from the start. It was only in the last 200 metres that the Britons were really worried, when the Italian crew began a charge for the line. The Italians got closer and closer but the British four held on and crossed the finish 0.48 seconds ahead. Then, in a typical gesture of comradeship, Matthew clambered over their crewmate Tim Foster and embraced Redgrave before tumbling into the Penrith Lake. All the while, I was desperately writing a few new paragraphs to my story to catch the last edition of *The Times* in London. I hardly had time to savour the victory. But I have had time subsequently.

Barely a month goes by when I don't recall at least one of these three memories, and for much of the rest of the time I am thinking of other occasions I have witnessed at the world's greatest sports event.

**John Goodbody**



*Sebastian Coe*

**Lord Sebastian Coe** is one of the greatest athletes that Britain has ever produced, being the only man to have won two Olympic 1,500 metres titles – the ‘blue ribbon’ athletics event of the Games. During a fourteen-year international career, he set eight outdoor and three indoor world records. He also won the European 800 metres title in 1986 and took silver medals in this event at the 1980 and 1984 Olympics. After retiring in 1990, he moved into politics and was a Conservative Member of Parliament from 1992–97, and subsequently Chief of Staff to William Hague, the leader of the Tory party. In May 2004, he took over as chairman of the bid committee to bring the 2012 Olympics to London, and it was his mesmerising speech at the 2005 Congress of the International Olympic Committee in Singapore that was a significant reason for the city being awarded the Games. He is now chairman of the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games. In 2007, he was elected vice-president of the International Association of Athletic Federations, the world governing body for track and field.



*Barry Davies*

**Barry Davies** began broadcasting with British Forces Broadcasting Services as a National Services officer in the Royal Army Service Corps. On leaving the army he worked for BBC radio (where he met his future wife, Penny) and then at *The Times* before being chosen by ITV for the 1966 World Cup held in, and won by, England. His first football commentary was Chelsea against A C Milan in February 1966. He covered his first Olympic Games with ITV in Mexico City in 1968 and joined BBC TV a year later. He has covered ten World Cups, ten Olympic

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Summer Games, seven Olympic Winter Games and seven Commonwealth Games. He has commentated on many sports and events over the last forty years: from football to Olympic opening ceremonies; hockey to rowing; figure skating and ice hockey to gymnastics; Wimbledon to the Boat Race; to the Lord Mayor's Show and the last Royal Tournament. He lives happily in Datchet in Berkshire with Penny (formerly British Airways Crew). Their daughter Giselle is the Director of Communications at the International Olympic Committee and their son Mark is the Managing Director of Betfair. Barry was awarded the MBE in 2005.



*John Goodbody*

**John Goodbody** will be covering the Beijing Olympics for *The Sunday Times* – his eleventh successive Summer Games. He was Sports News Correspondent for *The Times* for nearly twenty-two years, winning journalistic awards in every decade with the paper, most recently being voted Sports Reporter of The Year in 2001 and getting the prize in 2002 for The Sports Story of the Year. He covered his first Games in 1968, alongside Barry Davies, and has subsequently written several books on the event, including *The Olympic Movement* for The International Olympic Committee.

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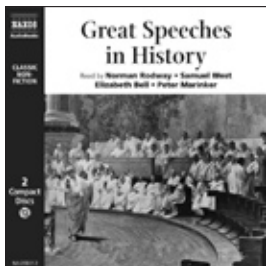
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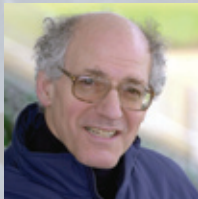
# John Goodbody

## A HISTORY OF THE OLYMPICS

The Summer Olympics is the biggest sporting event in the world, witnessed by billions of people across the globe. Since 1896, countries have competed for the honour of hosting the next Olympic Games – this year's will be held in Beijing, bringing together 203 countries, 28 sports and around 11,000 athletes.

For this unique Naxos AudioBooks recording, John Goodbody, the distinguished journalist and broadcaster, has written the fascinating history of the Games – from the triumphs of victory to the tragedy in Munich in 1972. Here are all the famous names: Sebastian Coe, Paavo Nurmi, Carl Lewis, Mark Spitz, Larissa Latynina and many others.

*A History of the Olympics* is read by Barry Davies, the broadcaster and commentator whose voice will be familiar to all those interested in sports. This recording also includes a forty-minute interview with world-famous athlete Sebastian Coe.



John Goodbody



Barry Davies



Sebastian Coe

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