



Five rings to bring them all: a presentation of the Olympic flags

Peter Hans van den Muijzenberg

Abstract

The paper presents information about Olympic flags. Primarily it gives an overview of the first Olympic flags, and of Olympic flag specimens of special significance. Occasionally the text will also cover the veracity of a story related to such a specimen.

Preface

Olympic flags are generally not flown permanently. Rather, they are visible only at very specific times, and in very specific locations. Yet despite or maybe because of this, people seem fascinated by the lore and ceremonies regarding Olympic flags and they gratefully accept any flag information made available by the Olympic Movement.

The sources provided by the Olympic Movement do not of course focus primarily on the flag. When information about the flag is needed, this often leads to a suggestion that de Coubertin appeared in Paris with a single 'Olympic flag', which then continued through the years and multiplied in as many specimens of various sizes as needed for Olympic events. While this is close to the truth, it has a drawback.

Flags have history; flags have names. People talking about flags and their history also use these names. For lack of information, people talking about Olympic flags will apply any name they think might fit. The consequent failure to distinguish between various specimens allows a semi-mediaeval construction of big flag myths from all kinds of little flag facts that originally did not belong together. The mighty saga of the Olympic flag may be a good read, but so much misunderstanding is caused that by now even specialists in flags or the Olympics can be seen confusing elements of its history, or mixing up different flag specimens.

With this text I hope to offer some support to those seeking to determine which fact belongs to which flag. Where facts are lacking, I also offer some speculations: some old, some new. I trust, however, that the reader will easily recognise these speculations and will only accept them as true after they lead to research that can prove that they are indeed correct.

The first Olympic flag: the London flag

The modern Olympic Games were organised initially without a symbol representing the wider Olympic Movement. This is quite understandable in the case of two of the early Olympics – Athens 1896 and Athens 1906 – as they were Olympic Games held in Greece, a very clear concept. However, Paris 1900, St Louis 1904 and London 1908 were held at longer intervals and tied to large exhibitions, so an identifying symbol might have served to stress that these



were not one-off events but part of a wider Olympic Movement. Still, the first flag known to belong to the movement is indeed a flag from London 1908. It is a Union flag of the pattern used for British regimental colours, in the centre a red ring with yellow edges, bearing the text *OLYMPIC · GAMES +* in gold, and inside the ring a depiction of a thistle, rose and shamrock.



*Flag of the British Olympic Council, the OGOC of London 1908, now in the offices of the British Olympic Association.
BBC Sport, Olympics, 'Photos of 1908 memorabilia', Item 2 (26 April 2008),
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/olympics/7362712.stm>*

The flag states 'Olympic Games' with no mention of either the British Olympic Council or the British Olympic Association (BOA): the former served as the Olympic Games Organising Committee (OGOC); the latter, as the National Olympic Committee (NOC). The BOA seemingly had no flag until Queen Elizabeth II approved a badge for the organisation in 1970,¹ suggesting that this London 1908 flag was the flag of the OGOC, the British Olympic Council. No information about its creator seems to be known. When I contacted the College of Arms, the officer in waiting, Somerset Herald, saw no reason to assume that the College had been involved in the design.² As Theodore Cook was involved in organising London 1908, and in their artistic implementation,³ he may well have been responsible for the flag although it may be impossible to determine if he was its designer.

An Olympic flag

First proposal

Whether or not Theodore Cook was involved in the creation of the London 1908 flag, he must have been familiar with it. Thus it should come as little surprise that at a session of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in Luxembourg in 1910, Cook presented a model flag for the Olympics. A committee was set up to investigate; it reported back but its proposal was not accepted. Then at the May 1913 session of the IOC, in Lausanne, Cook's proposal was rejected.⁴ No specifics are known of Cook's design or of the committee's proposal (if indeed these were different designs).

¹ Philip Barker, 'By Royal Appointment', *Journal of Olympic History*, 13 (November 2005).

² Personal email from Somerset Herald, 14 June 2017.

³ Karl Lennartz, 'The Story of the Rings', *Journal of Olympic History*, 10 (December 2001/January 2002), pp. 29-61.

⁴ Ibid.



The rings

That same year, de Coubertin began adding a symbol to Olympic correspondence. At first it consisted of a row of five overlapping rings,⁵ but by July 1913 it had evolved to a zigzag line in five colours.⁶ In August, de Coubertin described the emblem and flag he was planning for 1914:

The emblem chosen to illustrate and represent this World Congress of 1914 which will seal the re-establishment of the Olympic Games has started to appear on various preliminary documents: Five regularly interlocked rings – blue, yellow, black, green, red – standing out against the white of the paper. These five rings represent the five parts of the world now won over to Olympism and willing to accept the fruitful rivalries. Plus, the six colours thus combined mirror those of each and every country. The blue and yellow of Sweden, the blue and white of Greece, the French, British, American, German, Belgian, Italian, Hungarian tricolours, the yellow and red of Spain adjoin the innovations of Brazil and Australia, with the old Japan and the young China. See here a truly international emblem. It was quite right to make it into a flag, and the aesthetics will be perfect. Such a flag is light, shimmering, spiritual to see fluttering; it has a great symbolic significance. Its success is assured; so much so even that after the Congress it could well be kept in use and be flown at Olympic occasions.⁷



Left, Baron de Coubertin's original design comprised five uncoloured rings in a straight line; right, the amended version adds colour to the rings and places them in two lines

This description is often quoted in reference to the Olympic flag but in fact it applied originally to the emblem on paper. And, at this point, de Coubertin is still describing an emblem for the World Congress of 1914, although a flag is on the horizon and may become a more permanent symbol.

Note also that no comma follows the words 'parts of the world'. Coubertin is not referring here to the five geographical continents, which all happen to have been won over. Rather, he is referring the five specific locations that have so far hosted the Olympics. Only later does a comma make its appearance, allowing 'parts of the world' to be interpreted as continents.

Why did de Coubertin not say simply, 'The five rings represent the five celebrations of the Olympics so far'? It is an open question. As de Coubertin was trying to persuade the world, he perhaps felt that he had to embrace the opportunity to express this. Equally, the Olympics had by then been celebrated on six occasions, though de Coubertin would rather that Athens 1906 had never taken place. Counting locations rather than the Games themselves would have allowed him to ignore it, as he would then need to count Athens only once.

⁵ *The Olympic Symbols*, 2nd edition (Lausanne: Olympic Museum, 2007).

⁶ Lennartz, 'The Story of the Rings'.

⁷ Pierre de Coubertin, 'L'émblème et le drapeau de 1914', *Revue Olympique*, 92 (August 1913), pp.119-20. Translated from the French original.



Still, whatever the reason for his wording, it's still possible that he merely forgot to insert a comma.

The flag of the Olympic Congress

The flag described by de Coubertin did indeed come into existence, as stated in the *Bulletin du Comité International Olympique*:

The Olympic flag was designed in 1913 by Baron de Coubertin who had it made in the workshops of Bon Marché in the Rue du Bac in Paris. Coubertin entrusted it in 1914 to Mr. Angelo Bolanaki, who was the senior member of the International Olympic Committee until the time of his death in Lausanne in 1963.⁸

It seems likely that this was the flag raised on 5 April 1914 at the Pan-Egyptian Games in Chatby Stadium, Alexandria, Egypt,⁹ to announce the Olympic Congress in June. (Some while ago I read further details which I recall as follows: a journal entry for 4 January 1914 describes de Coubertin showing the flag for the Congress to his guest, Mr Bolanaki; then, in an entry for 6 January, de Coubertin entrusts the flag to Bolanaki. Unfortunately, a younger PHM didn't realise that this information was not otherwise available and consequently failed to note the source.)

The first flag

A letter from de Coubertin dated 9 October 1935 describes the flags that he commissioned from Le Bon Marché:

Towards the beginning of 1914 I then presented my deeply symbolic flag (the five continents united by Olympism and the colours of all nations) after having carefully reconsidered the proportions in regard to the background. I had the flag made in the Bon Marché (a machine had to be constructed solely for its fabrication). I think nearly 500 flags were made.¹⁰

So 20 years after the event he was claiming that his design referred to the continents, although he didn't use those words at the time. But the letter does tell us that de Coubertin had so many flags made in early 1914 that a specially constructed machine was needed. So what was so special about the single example entrusted to Bolanaki? Did de Coubertin pull just one flag out of the bale? And why did he need to 'reconsider' the flag's proportions? When had he done so before?

One puzzle may perhaps solve another. Lucien Philippe reports a claim made by Andre Charnier, former president of flag manufacturer Festa, that the first flag was made not by Le Bon Marché but by Festa's founder, Paul Maurice Charnier. In late 1913, Charnier helped de Coubertin to specify the first flag, which he then made for him.¹¹ This is a strange claim to make when everyone 'knows'

⁸ 'The Olympic Flag', *Bulletin du Comité International Olympique*, 87 (15 August 1964), pp. 45-6.

⁹ 'Concerning the First Olympic Flag', *Bulletin du Comité International Olympique*, 55 (July 1956), p. 62.

¹⁰ Quoted in Lennartz, 'The Story of the Rings'.

¹¹ Lucien Philippe, 'Précisions sur les origines du drapeau olympique,' *Emblèmes et Pavillons*, 37 (August 1993); referenced by William Crampton, '100 Years of the Olympic Games: Flag Challenges of the XXVI Olympiad',



that the first flag was made by Le Bon Marché. Yet, it becomes more likely when we know that Le Bon Marché was producing a machine-made item in revised proportions. Charnier may thus have made the very first flag, helping to work out the design, before de Coubertin placed a large order for a revised specification with Le Bon Marché. In this way, de Coubertin would have entrusted Bolanaki with the one existing specimen of the flag, while the other flags were in production or the new machine was being built. Eventually, the earliest flags used by the IOC would be the Bon Marché examples, but the very earliest specimen to be flown would have been that initial flag made by Charnier, rather than one of a batch of nearly 500. It also means that the very first flag was made not in 1914 but in late 1913.

According to the *Bulletin* once again, 'Mr. Bolanaki returned the original flag to the International Olympic Committee in 1959 and it is today in a show-case in the Olympic Museum in Lausanne.'¹²



The 'Bolanaki flag', Olympic Museum, Lausanne.

Caroline Bishop, 'Photos: Olympic Museum sports new look', *The Local* (11 December 2013), <https://www.thelocal.ch/galleries/1/remodelled-olympic-museum-sports-new-look/4>

The photograph appears to show that the flag was created by joining two widths of cloth. This suggests that its maker didn't have the width required, which for an order of nearly 500 could perhaps have been obtained. The colours are very dark and the rings look slightly uneven (although this may be caused by stretching). In yellow near the bottom of the flag, the text *ALEXANDRIE 5 AVRIL 1914* was added while Bolanaki had the flag, in reference to the very first flying of the design. While the exact date of the text is unknown, it was certainly present when Bolanaki returned the flag to the IOC in 1959. Thus its presence or absence can help to verify any claim that a photograph shows the first Olympic flag.

The Olympic flag

The flag for the Congress made its grand appearance in the large quantity ordered by de Coubertin. When describing the accompanying festivities, he mentions 'Olympic flags',¹³ suggesting that the flag was adopted as such during

Flagmaster, 84 (Autumn 1996).

¹² 'The Olympic Flag', pp. 45-6.

¹³ Pierre de Coubertin, 'Les fêtes olympiques de Paris', *Revue olympique* (July 1914).



the Congress. However, the minutes – due to appear in *Revue olympique* – were never published due to the outbreak of war. Consequently, we do not know how or if the flag of the Congress was formally adopted as the Olympic flag.

Also uncertain is the flags' exact appearance. De Coubertin merely mentions changing the ratio between the rings and the field before he ordered the flags from Le Bon Marché, so it seems likely that the Congress flags were the same size as the Charnier flag and that only the rings were different. In 1967, the IOC described the flags as follows: 'This first flag is 3 meters long, and 2 meters wide: the emblem placed in the centre is 2.06m by 60cm.'¹⁴ Although in hindsight not all the claims made in this article appear to be accurate, we can assume that these were the dimensions of the Congress flags turned Olympic flags.

At one point, de Coubertin's letter states that 'many members of the congress took a flag back home with them.'¹⁵ Unfortunately, old Olympic flags are hard to find, and those that appear are sometimes traceable no further than Antwerp 1920. But then, de Coubertin must have had some flags left over. Might he have used them to assist Antwerp?

The flags of the Games of the Olympiad

Antwerp flag

Although 'Antwerp flag' is a name seen regularly in reports on the Olympic Games, it is subject to some confusion. Like 'first Olympic flag', it is used sometimes to denote a group of specimens – here all the Olympic flags flown at Antwerp 1920, the Games where they were first encountered by competitors. More commonly, however, it is used in association with the two ceremonial flags introduced at Antwerp 1920: the 'flag of the Games' (or 'stadium flag') and the 'handover flag'. The 'flag of the Games' flies from the main flagpole at the Olympic stadium for the duration of the event (previously, of course, no ceremonial flag existed and the stadium had no main flagpole); the 'handover flag' is that transferred ceremonially from one host city to its successor.

The Olympic Charter of 1938 is vague on the subject of the flags at Antwerp 1920, stating only that 'The flag used at Antwerp was the regulation model', and referring to 'the Olympic flag of embroidered satin, presented in 1920'.¹⁶ Organisations within the Olympic Movement normally identify the 'Antwerp flag' as the 'handover flag'. Of contemporary media reports, some identify the 'Antwerp flag' as the 'handover flag', others as the 'flag of the Games'. Some warn not to confuse the two flags and inadvertently use the wrong name. Finally, sporadic references suggest that Antwerp's 'flag of the Games' – whose size and cost made it a prime candidate for the role – became the 'handover flag' after the Games had ended.

To resolve this confusion, if not for the world then at least for readers of this text, I contacted the Olympic Museum and explained the problem. Their reply drew a clear distinction between the larger 'flag of the Games' and the

¹⁴ 'The Olympic Flag', *Newsletter of the IOC*, 2 (November 1967), pp. 15-16.

¹⁵ Lennartz, 'The Story of the Rings'.

¹⁶ IOC, 'Olympic Rules', 1938, pp. 48, 51; <https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/Olympic-Studies-Centre/List-of-Resources/Official-Publications/Olympic-Charters/EN-1938-Olympic-Charter-Olympic-Rules.pdf>



'Antwerp flag':

For the Games of the VII Olympiad Antwerp 1920 Closing ceremony protocol was modified and expanded upon. The newly introduced Olympic flag (of larger size and not the 'Antwerp' flag) was lowered and a smaller fringe-bordered Olympic flag commonly referred to as the 'Antwerp' flag was also introduced. A gift of the Belgian Olympic Committee, this was subsequently designated to be handed over from Summer Games host city to Summer Games host city.¹⁷

In 1920, to commemorate the Games, the Belgian Olympic Committee did indeed present to the IOC a fringe-bordered silk Olympic flag which, like the original Bolanaki flag, was not made from one piece of cloth.¹⁸ De Coubertin asked the city fathers to retain it and present it to their successors in Paris four years later.¹⁹ In this way the 'handover flag' was launched on its journey from one host city to the next, retained for four years by the past host city, then presented to its successor at the Opening of the next Games.



King Albert presents prizes at Antwerp 1920; the Olympic flag is top left. Nele Cleijmans, 'Olympisch goud, zilver en brons', Cachet, 24 (September 2003), http://www.zilverbank.nl/expertise_tijdschrift_cachet.php

An oft-repeated story states that the Antwerp flag was a replacement made when on the final day the Olympic flag could not be found.²⁰ This seems unlikely given the amount of time needed to manufacture such a flag, and the photograph above of King Albert I presenting a prize at Antwerp 1920, with a fringe-bordered Olympic flag in the background, seems to prove the story false.

Karl Lennartz mentions also the theft of flags during Antwerp 1920, among them the 'flag of the Games', which was stolen after the ceremonies on the Opening Day.²¹ This lends some credence to the idea that the 'Antwerp flag' was

¹⁷ Personal email from Olympic Museum, 20 January 2017.

¹⁸ 'The Seoul Flag Becomes the New Olympic Standard', *Olympic Review*, 215 (September 1985), pp. 551-2.

¹⁹ 'Antwerp 1920', <http://olympic.ca/games/1920-antwerp/>

²⁰ Myles Garcia, *Secrets of the Olympic Ceremonies* (MAG Publishing, 2010).

²¹ Lennartz, 'The Story of the Rings'; others were stolen during the competitions, see R. Renson, 'Re: Olympic Flag Raiders in Antwerp 1920', *Journal of Olympic History* (2002), pp. 6-11.



created in reaction to this event. The Games lasted almost a month, giving plenty of time to manufacture the flag, whatever its intended purpose. The thieves were found, but not the 'flag of the Games', so at the closing ceremony an Olympic flag was placed on the entrance arch and lowered instead.²²

History of the Antwerp flag

Officially, the 'Antwerp flag' travelled every four years – to Paris 1924, Amsterdam 1928, Los Angeles 1932 and finally to Berlin 1936, where it remained throughout the Second World War. It was retrieved and brought to the United Kingdom for London 1948, then continued thereafter via Helsinki 1952, Melbourne 1956, Rome 1960, Tokyo 1964, Mexico City 1968, Munich 1972 and Montreal 1976.



Munich 1972, opening ceremony. 'Olympische Spiele München 1972 – Eröffnungsfeier', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRZafGVuROQ>

In 1980 the 'Antwerp flag' reached Moscow and should have progressed four years later to Los Angeles 1984. But as the USA had boycotted Moscow 1980, the Los Angeles OGOC could hardly demand that the USSR appear to hand it over, and in the event the USSR returned the favour and boycotted LA.

By unspecified means, the flag reached Los Angeles and was passed to the city during the opening ceremony, but the stand-off had led to the realisation that the flag was made vulnerable by remaining in the host city after each Games, and the method of handover changed.

From Los Angeles 1984 onwards, the Antwerp flag was presented to the next host city during the closing ceremony, to be held for four years in anticipation of its Games.²³

This new dispensation also provided a better balance between the opening and closing ceremonies. However, after the 'Antwerp flag' was passed to Seoul in 1984, it was deemed too worn from years of use and was retired the following year to be placed in the Olympic Museum.²⁴

²² *Rotterdams Nieuwsblad* (15 September 1920).

²³ Philip Barker, 'A formal goodbye to two wonderful weeks of Olympic action, 12 August 2012'; <http://www.insidethegames.biz/index.php/articles/18212>

²⁴ 'The Seoul Flag becomes the new Olympic Standard'.



Moscow 1980: Sandra Henderson and Stéphane Préfontaine, who lit the Olympic flame at Montreal 1976, IOC President Lord Killanin and Viktor Grishin, 1st Secretary of the Moscow Party Committee, with the 'Antwerp flag'. 'Moscow Olympics, part 7', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TC4jJ4G34bA>

Los Angeles flag

If the USSR and the USA weren't speaking, how did the 'Antwerp flag' reach LA from Moscow in 1984? It has been suggested that perhaps it did not, and that a replica was used instead. The reason for its official retirement in 1985 would then be its absence, rather than the wear caused by short periods of use every four years.²⁵ If this is correct, we can expect the images of the two flags (above and below) to show some differences. And it appears that they do. The colours of the 'Antwerp flag' appear consistent with those used at Antwerp 1920, while the colours of the 'Los Angeles flag' resemble those of the very first Olympic flag. Unless the light plays very strange tricks, these are indeed different flags.



Los Angeles 1984, closing ceremony: Mayor Tom Bradley, IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch and Mayor of Seoul Yom Po-hyun with the 'Los Angeles flag'. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILq5iRNZBY4#t=4428.330791>

²⁵ Karl Lennartz, 'The Story of the Rings – Part II', *Journal of Olympic History*, 11 (June 2003), pp. 33-7.



Zuchelli flag

Another Los Angeles-related claim is that the Edward J. Zuchelli collection contained the 1920 Antwerp Olympic flag. It had supposedly flown at Paris 1924 and Amsterdam 1928 but had been replaced for Los Angeles 1932 due to wear and tear. Textile experts certified that the flag was from Europe, c.1920.²⁶

This is obviously not the 'Antwerp flag', as it flew at Paris and Amsterdam, and had not been handed over. Nor could it have been the 'flag of the Games', since those of Antwerp 1920 and Paris 1924 had both been stolen; the latter was a giant 10-meter flag that when retrieved was minus its Olympic rings.²⁷ According to the story, the remaining possibility was that Los Angeles had received a decorative flag, or a flag that flew at other venues, and retired it there from active duty. However, a photograph shows that the flag is really very large, so this seems unlikely. Whatever its exact history, the size of the flag alone shows that it is not the 'Antwerp flag'.

Seoul flag

On 27 September 1984, the Seoul Olympic Organising Committee (SLOOC) presented the IOC president, Juan Antonio Samaranch, with a new Olympic flag – one of two 'Seoul flags' commissioned by the SLOOC at the IOC's request.²⁸ This flag presented would officially replace the 'Antwerp flag', about to be retired to the Olympic Museum. The other 'Seoul flag' was to be kept at IOC Headquarters in Lausanne.²⁹

Like the 'Antwerp flag', the 'Seoul flag' measures 3m × 2m and is made of pure Korean raw silk. Unlike its predecessor, however, it is a seamless, three-ply flag. The emblem is 2m × 0.6m, with the rings made of the same fabric as the field.³⁰



London 2012, closing ceremony: Mayor of London Boris Johnson, IOC President Jacques Rogge and Mayor of Rio de Janeiro Eduardo Paes with the 'Seoul flag'.

Tom Degun, 'Pelé surprises London 2012 Closing Ceremony crowd with Rio 2016 handover performance' (12 August 2012), <http://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/18228>

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ *Het Vaderland* (1 August 1924).

²⁸ Ture Widland, 'Commentary: Of Olympic Chains and Flags: The Debate Continues', *Olympika*, 7 (1998), pp. 173-6

²⁹ 'The Seoul Flag becomes the new Olympic Standard'.

³⁰ Ibid.

Sydney flag

During Sydney 2000, a rumour circulated in the media that the 'Seoul flag' had been a sub-standard replacement, forcing the Sydney OGOOC to have a new copy made. However, no further mention of a new flag appeared after the Games. This rumour may have concerned the 'handover flag'; it may have started with any number of new flags created for the Games; or the OGOOC may have experienced problems with the 'flag of the Games': it is impossible to tell.

Rio flag

At Rio de Janeiro 2016 the flag was apparently changed once again, so far without explanation. To me, it appears reduced in size, making it a less imposing sight, but that may not have been the original intention.



Rio de Janeiro 2016, closing ceremony: Mayor Eduardo Paes, IOC President Thomas Bach and Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike with the 'Rio flag'. Nick Butler, 'Rio 2016 declared "marvellous" as Olympics close with samba celebration in pouring rain and facing power problems', 21 August 2016, <http://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1040864/>

The flag of the Winter Olympics

Oslo flag

The Winter Olympics began with the International Winter Sports Week in Chamonix in 1924, but the first handover did not take place until the 6th Games in Oslo in 1952, with a flag presented by the City of Oslo.³¹

Although similar in size to the 'Antwerp flag', the 'Oslo flag' is different in that it is a regular flag, it is not tied to the flagstaff, and it has no fringe.

Poster

This poster showing flags flying from ski poles also originated at Oslo 1952.

However, there is something curious about it. In the English version, the rings are not linked in the normal way; Instead, the top of the green ring is behind both the rings above it, and the bottom extends beyond the base of the rings.

³¹ Olympic Charter 1985; [https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document %20Library/OlympicOrg/Olympic-Studies-Centre/List-of-Resources/Official-Publications/Olympic-Charters/EN-1985-Olympic-Charter.pdf](https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/Olympic-Studies-Centre/List-of-Resources/Official-Publications/Olympic-Charters/EN-1985-Olympic-Charter.pdf)



*Poster advertising Oslo 1952.
Matthew's Island of Misfit Toys,
'Posters from old winter
Olympic games',
[https://mattsko.wordpress.com/2014/
02/12/](https://mattsko.wordpress.com/2014/02/12/)*

Order of the rings

The poster was somewhat prophetic, as in early 2014 a piece of Olympic trivia suddenly appeared all over the media, probably in connection with the Sochi Winter Olympics. The story went more or less like this: during a rehearsal for the opening ceremony of the Sapporo Winter Olympics in 1972, the organisers were told that the Olympic flag was wrong. Checking further, they found that the rings were not in the standard order of blue, yellow, black, green, red. Yet the flag had been in use since 1952.



*Turin 2006, closing ceremony: Mayor Sergio Chiamparino, IOC President Jacques Rogge and Mayor of Vancouver Sam Sullivan with the 'Oslo flag'.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuglfxU2Xw>*

This story must clearly refer to the 'Oslo flag', designed for a Winter Games like Sapporo 1972. However, the colours of the 'Oslo flag' are correct – they are simply correct on both sides. Where the reverse of other Olympic flags shows the emblem in reverse – and thus displays the rings in the wrong order – the 'Oslo flag' shows the rings in obverse on both sides.

This seems likely to be the true subject of the anecdote, even if the problem is the exact opposite of that stated. The order of the rings on the 'Oslo flag' is correct – blue, yellow, black, green, red – where on most other Olympic flags it is not.

Change of ceremonies

Calgary 1988 was the first Winter Games to use the new method devised for the 'handover flag'. Hence, during the opening ceremony at Calgary, the 'Oslo flag'



was presented by the previous host, Sarajevo; and during the closing ceremony it was handed to the next host, Albertville.



*Calgary 1988, opening ceremony:
Calgary's Mayor Klein with the
Olympic flag.
<https://albertaonrecord.ca/is-ccg-olympics-312>*



*Calgary 1988, closing ceremony:
IOC President Juan Samaranch hands
the 'Oslo flag' to Albertville's Mayor
Dujol. <https://albertaonrecord.ca/is-ccg-olympics-250>*

Replicas

The 'Oslo flag' now travels from city to city in a protective case, but a 'replica' is used for the actual handover ceremony.

It appears that this change has never been officially announced, but as Vancouver published the details within a week of the closing ceremony at Turin 2006,³² it would appear that it was introduced either at Turin 2006 or Vancouver 2010.

Unfortunately, the replicas used subsequently are not very exact.

They appear very much like the ordinary Olympic flags made for each Games.

They don't look very ceremonial; nor do they match the most distinctive feature of the 'Oslo flag', in that their reverse is in reverse.

Flags of the Youth Olympic Games

Though both the Summer and the Winter edition of the Youth Olympic Games have handover ceremonies, neither seems to have a dedicated 'handover flag'.

Winter Youth Olympic Games

The flag handed over at Innsbruck 2012 could have been a replica of its big brother, the 'Oslo flag', in that the Olympic rings were in obverse on both sides.³³

³² 'The Olympic Flags and Emblem, With Glowing Hearts', 7 March 2006; http://www.vancouver2010.com/olympic-news/n/news/feature-stories/the-olympic-flags-and-emblem_383441Z.html

³³ 'Closing Ceremony, Innsbruck 2012'; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOhktWAERwA>

Unfortunately, the flag handed over at Lillehammer 2016 was clearly not the same flag as it did not share this characteristic.³⁴



The 'Norway flag' in its case

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Maggie and Ian Sumner: without them helping me past the obstacles I got stuck on, both regarding the ICV and regarding the presentation, I probably would have given up, and this paper would not have existed.

Author biography



Peter Hans van den Muijzenberg, Frisian Herald of the Isles, lives in Sneek, though in 1961 he was born in Hilversum.

The formal education he received doesn't quite support his interest in flags but probably did improve his skills in information retrieval and analysis.

He approaches the study of flags mostly with knowledge gathered over the years and a willingness to invest time in hunting down missing details. Though he has a tendency to attack any problem that he encounters in the field, he is more interested in the development of the science as a whole than in details of specific flags. Apart from flags, he has such diverse interests as sailing, Olympics, and train games, all of which he prefers over writing about himself.

³⁴ 'Closing Ceremony Highlights, Lillehammer 2016 Youth Olympic Games', Olympic Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tz5oPvTANz0>