

Press information

Stockholm. 100 years of innovation.

The 1912 Olympics in Stockholm were revolutionary for the Olympic Games and for sports in general in many ways. Not only was it the first Olympics with participants from all five continents, but multiple technical innovations in sports first saw the light of day here, as did new ideas that expanded the games even further. The spirit of innovation has been a central theme throughout the history of Sweden and Stockholm, and Stockholm was recently named the “European Region of the Future”.

Bang! The starting shot rang out for electronic timing

“Sooner or later I will suggest an electronic device for the start and timing of the 100 meter run.” These words were spoken by Leopold Englund, president of the Swedish Sports Confederation. The year was 1910. Two years later, at the 1912 Stockholm Olympics, the idea became a reality. Electronic timing, an almost Utopian idea, was used in athletics for the first time. L.M. Ericsson, currently one of the world’s leading telecom companies (Ericsson), was tasked with developing the technology. But the engineer and inventor Ragnar Carlstedt ultimately delivered the final product. And in the same period, he developed another revolutionary invention; the finish line camera.

Click! The world’s first photo finish is taken

The race for the silver in the 1500-meter Olympic final was excruciatingly close. The two American sprinters Abel Kiviat and Norm Taber gave all they had left down the home stretch and crossed the finish line at the exact same time: 3.56.9. But who was actually first? Only the photo sheet could make the final call, which showed that Kiviat was “slightly” ahead when crossing the finish line. The competitions were the first in the world to use a finish line camera, and once again, engineer Ragnar Carlstedt was behind the invention. He developed the ideas of the finish line camera and electronic timing at the same time. The significance of these two inventions led the major Swedish newspapers to write: “Electronic timing at the Olympic Games. Simultaneous timing and photography of contestants. A brilliant idea!”

The birth of the modern pentathlon

In March 1910, two years before the Olympics, the Swedish Olympic organization grappled with a sensitive issue. They were to discuss whether or not to implement a new Olympic event: the modern pentathlon. The event would select the world's best all-round man, who would dominate running, swimming, fencing, shooting and riding. The suggestion started a heated debate, but it was finally given the go-ahead, and the world's first modern Olympic pentathlon was held in Stockholm in 1912. At the end of the race, which assembled 36 participants, three Swedes stood at the top of the podium. The modern pentathlon has been on the Olympic program ever since then.

Mon Dieu! Stockholm organizes Olympic Art Competitions

Is it possible to compete in culture? Yes, according to IOC president Pierre de Coubertin, who wanted to introduce five cultural events to the 1912 Stockholm Olympics program: music, painting, sculpture, literature and architecture. However, the Swedish organization committee, led by honorary chairman Crown Prince Gustav Adolf, was unmoved and dismissed the suggestion gently but firmly. But de Coubertin was not inclined to give up so easily. The Olympic Art Competitions were his life's work, and he had dedicated 20 years to making the dream a reality. He was determined to achieve the goal.

After an uproar among Swedish artists and caustic correspondence between the Swedish organization committee and de Coubertin, in which he declared "war", the Art Competitions were ultimately implemented. And so the world's first Olympic games in culture were held in Stockholm in 1912. How did it go? Italy took home two gold medals, while the US and Germany took home one medal each. No medals were distributed in the music competition, because the IOC felt that "no serious contributions were entered". De Coubertin's dream lived until the Olympics in London in 1948, when the last Olympic Art Competitions were held.

The poster that made the world blush

The technical innovations were not the only groundbreaking factor about the Stockholm Olympics. The official Olympics poster was incredibly creative. In fact, it was so creative that it took a year and a half to be approved, after which it triggered a public outcry in other countries, and was even banned.

What was so sensitive? First of all, there was the nudity. Artist Olle Hjortzberg had depicted a naked male athlete, waving the Swedish flag, with nothing more than a narrow ribbon covering the most sensitive male body part. That simply wasn't acceptable! But perhaps even more sensitive were the flags depicted in the background. Some countries may have been upset that their flags were placed too far back, or were not included at all!

After a year and a half of heated debate, including a competition in which other artists submitted alternative options, Hjortzberg's poster was approved at last. It was translated into 16 languages, which was unique in and of itself, and sent

out to the world. The world was horrified. In France it was compared to the promiscuous posters in which scantily clad women danced the cancan at the Moulin Rouge; the mayor of Oeffelt in Holland confiscated it, and in China, it was forbidden from being used as a postmark on the grounds that it “violated the country’s morals”. However, the Olympic Office received a positive reaction for the poster from the US; it was praised and proudly displayed in hotels, railways and business offices.

Sweden number one in innovation. Again.

For the second year in a row, Sweden has landed at the top of the European Business School’s Innovation Capacity Index. The index indicates a country’s opportunities for innovation by measuring over 60 different indicators that are regarded as having a major impact, such as institutional environment, human capital, education, social inclusion, rules and laws, infrastructure for research and development and the use of information and communication technology. Of the 131 participating countries, Switzerland and Singapore took second and third place, respectively.

For more information: www.innovationfordevelopmentreport.org

Swedes the most inventive people in the world

Sweden leads the world in terms of number of inventions per capita, according to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in its latest report. With 0.22 inventions per resident, Sweden shares first place with Japan, followed by Finland and Israel.

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Stockholm Business Region

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