

# Introduction

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## An Olympics Unlike Any Other

The story of the 1960 Olympic Winter Games is the saga of the highly improbable that became the wildly successful. Within it are compelling personal stories of underdogs that became unlikely champions, American ingenuity in the face of adversity and heroism for team and country. The inspiring story includes a promise kept to a dying loved one, brash stars that falter in the glare of a world spotlight, and risky strategies that payoff with golden results.

The idea of holding the Olympic Winter Games began as a marketing ploy with no real chance to succeed. With perseverance, shrewd strategy and adept salesmanship, the impossible became the possible, then the probable, and, finally, the stunningly triumphant. It is here the first Olympic Winter Games in the New West occurred and elevated the region to world-class resort status.

The VIII Olympic Winter Games took place over February 18-28, 1960 at Squaw Valley and Lake Tahoe in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California. From 30 countries around the world, 665 athletes gathered over 11 days to engage in five recognized Olympic winter sports and competed in 27 events. These sports and events included alpine skiing, Nordic combined, cross-

country skiing, biathlon, figure skating, speed skating, ice hockey and ski jumping

Here, for the first time, we saw elaborate Olympic pageantry in the ceremonies and venue decorations instilled by the creative force of Pageantry Chairman Walt Disney. The “Miracle of Squaw Valley” astonished spectators during the opening ceremonies. American women led the way in alpine skiing and Soviet women showed their strength in speed skating and cross-country skiing. The once dominant Austrian men struggled with team dissension and poor results in alpine skiing. We witnessed the peak of the Jernberg-Hakulinen Era in which two Scandinavian men thoroughly dominated international cross-country skiing over a 12-year period. A surprise victor emerged in the first Olympic biathlon. Speed skaters set new world records on the world’s first artificially chilled speed skating oval. Drama unfolded as a largely pickup team of ice hockey players fought to an unbeaten record and came from behind in the championship game to capture their country’s first gold medal. Americans again swept the individual figure skating gold medals with flawless performances. Upstarts wrote new chapters in sports history and created a new order of elite athletes that challenged once dominant countries.

For the only time in Olympic history, the venues and athlete residence halls were located in a compact intimate setting that encouraged sportsmanship and socializing among nations. Metal-plastic-wood composite alpine skis made their debut in Olympic competition and proved their effectiveness with a golden result. The skiing world forever changed with the introduction of never before used special grooming techniques. For the first time, electronics and emerging American computer technology played a central role in measurement and reporting of results. TV cameras trained on the Olympic events for first national live coverage. TV broadcasts to a captivated world elevated winter sports to a new level. The Olympic Winter Games forever changed the region and brought forth a completely new economy.

Learn about the innovative competition facilities and the challenges faced by organizers to turn an undeveloped mountain valley into an Olympic city that supported a daytime population of 50,000 for 11 days. Read the “you-are-there” accounts of the spirited competition, and see the time results and scores for the medal winners.

Photos taken by official Olympic photographer Bill Briner appear throughout this book and vividly tell the story of victory and defeat. Many photos appear here for the first time.

In this book, you will journey back over 50 years when the Olympics stood for athletic achievement and personal excellence. You will experience a time when only true amateurs, who made the sacrifice of total personal commitment, could reach for the gold.

#### **Olympic Winter Games History and the Olympic Movement**

In the first half of the 20th century and leading up to the Squaw Valley and Lake Tahoe Winter Games, winter sports had seen increasing worldwide popularity. Some winter sports first appeared on the program of summer Olympics competition in the early 20th century. Chamonix, France was the first officially designated site for 1924 Olympic Winter Games. These were followed by Winter Games in St. Moritz, Switzerland in 1928; Lake Placid, N.Y. in 1932; Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany in 1936; St. Moritz, Switzerland again in 1948; Oslo, Norway in 1952, and Cortina d’Ampezzo, Italy in 1956. No Winter Games were held in 1940 and 1944 due to World War II.

In the era of the 1960 Olympics, athletes were required to maintain amateur status. The International Olympic Committee defined an amateur as:

... [O]ne who participates and always has participated in sports solely for pleasure and for the physical, mental, or social benefits he derives [therefrom], and to whom participation in sport is nothing more than recreation without material gain of any kind, direct or indirect.

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The IOC established rules that prevented compensation for coaching, acceptance of competition prizes in excess of \$40, commercial profiting from athletic fame, or neglecting their usual vocation or employment in favor of sport competition. However, despite the rules, the notion of amateurism quickly eroded and some countries surreptitiously supported their athletes.

Peace had always been an underlying subtext of the competitions; but the Olympics itself neither could create peace, nor could it be the objective. Olympic founders and leaders believed that peace came from a better world. They deemed that a better world was the product of the involvement and character building of individuals engaged in athletic competition.

By hosting the VIII Olympic Winter Games, the United States extended its hand in peace and invited all nations of the world to compete in the spirit of understanding and harmony among all people.

