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Olympic Games 1916

By [Ansgar Molzberger](#)

In 1912, the 1916 Olympic Games were awarded to Berlin. In consultation with the International Olympic Committee, the German organizers started their work. However, the outbreak of World War I led to the discontinuation of the preparations. In January 1916, the failure of the Olympic Games became a certainty.

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Introduction

With the foundation of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) on 23 June 1894 in Paris, it was decided to establish the modern Olympic Games as a quadrennial international sporting festival. Following the premiere in Athens in 1896, the Olympic Games were to be rotated among cities around the world. After the beginning of the 20th century, the Olympic movement became more popular in [Germany](#). In 1904, with the *Deutscher Reichsausschuss für Olympische Spiele* (DRAfOS), a permanent German National Olympics Committee was established and the German IOC members began to promote Berlin as a future host city. This effort appeared to be succeeding, but the death of head of the campaign in 1909, Count [Egbert Hoyer von der Asseburg \(1847-1909\)](#), led to a withdrawal of Berlin's bid for the 1912 Olympic Games. Instead, Stockholm was selected as the host.

Preparing for the 1916 Olympic Games in Berlin

In 1911, the Germans began a new initiative. At the 1912 IOC meeting, the 1916 Olympic Games were awarded to Berlin, and the DRAfOS was instructed to take over the organization of the event.^[1] Henceforth, the Berlin Olympic Games were the primary concern of the DRAfOS. Its first course of action was to enlist a talented chief organizer. The most suitable person for this role was the young sports official, Carl Diem (1882-1962). Diem started work in March 1913 as the general secretary of the Organizing Committee for the 1916 Berlin Olympic Games.^[2]

A principal issue in the upcoming Games was the role of top level sports. Only five gold medals had been awarded in Stockholm. It was clear to both Diem and the DRAfOS that the traditionalists in the German gymnastic movement had to be drawn into the effort. In view of its role in physical education in Germany, the national gymnastic organization, the *Deutsche Turnerschaft* (DT), could not be left out of the preparations. However, the DT's hardliners regarded the international Olympic movement, whose motto was "*citius, altius, fortius*," as a French version of Anglo-American record-seeking high performance sports. This starkly contrasted with the vision of the German gymnasts, who stood for tradition, patriotism, and the ideal of versatile physical education for the masses. Therefore, they had resisted participating in the Olympic Games and did not send a team to Stockholm in 1912,^[3] despite the fact that gymnastics had been part of the Olympic competition since 1896.^[4]

A step towards cooperation between Olympic sports and German gymnastics was the inauguration of the "*Deutsches Stadion*" in Berlin on 8 June 1913, in which some 10,000 gymnasts participated.^[5] In addition, top level German sportspeople began to prepare. Alvin Kraenzlein (1876-1928), a German-American and former Olympic champion, took up his job as head coach of the German team on 1 October 1913. Plans were laid for a "National Olympics" in 1915, as a sort of Olympic trial. On 27 and 28 June 1914, the best German athletes competed in the so-called "Pre-Olympic Games". Even the DT participated with a large group of gymnasts. However, on the second day of competition, the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria-Este (1863-1914) in Sarajevo signalled the beginning of the end for the 1916 Olympic Games.

End of the 1916 Olympic Games

The outbreak of World War I on 28 July 1914 brought an end to preparations for the upcoming Olympic Games. The initial hope of the Organizing Committee, that a speedy conclusion of peace would allow the Berlin Olympic Games to take place, was dashed. By the time of the death of the DRAfOS chairman, Viktor von Podbielski (1844-1916), in January 1916, the failure of the Olympic Games had become a certainty, even though they were never officially cancelled.

In 1915, the French baron Pierre de Coubertin (1863-1937), the IOC founder and chairman, had decided to move the IOC headquarters from [France](#) to Lausanne in [neutral Switzerland](#). The IOC did not meet again until 1919, when Antwerp was selected as host city for the 1920 Olympic Games.

The first post-war Games took place without German participation. As a consequence of World War I, Germany was excluded from the Olympic Games until 1928.

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Notes

1. ↑ Minutes of the IOC session 1912, pp. 12-13. IOC Archive, file "Sessions 1894-1985". See also Kluge, Volker: *Olympische Sommerspiele – Die Chronik. Athen 1896 – Berlin 1936*, volume 1, Berlin 1997, p. 383.
2. ↑ Minutes of the DRAfOS "Bestellung eines Generalsekretärs für die Olympiade 1916", 10 November 1912. Carl and Liselott Diem-Archive, "Carl Diem-Nachlass – 1.4: Sachakten", file 1: "Deutscher Reichsausschuß für Olympische Spiele 1895, 1906, 1908, 1909, 1912-1914".
3. ↑ See Langenfeld, Hans: *Die ersten beiden Jahrzehnte*, in: Lämmer, Manfred (Ed. on behalf of the National Olympic Committee for Germany): *Deutschland in der Olympischen Bewegung – Eine Zwischenbilanz*, Frankfurt 1999, pp. 41-83, here p. 69. See also Molzberger, Ansgar: *Die Olympischen Spiele 1912 in Stockholm – Zwischen Patriotismus und Internationalität*, Studien zur Sportgeschichte, volume 9, St. Augustin 2012, pp. 139-153.
4. ↑ For details on the 1916 Olympic competition program see Molzberger, Ansgar: *Von Stockholm 1912 bis Berlin 1916 – Die "schwedisch-germanische Periode" der Olympischen Bewegung*, in: *Stadion* 31/38-39 (2014), pp. 43-56.
5. ↑ See Reinberg, F.: *Das Deutsche Stadion in Berlin und seine Einweihung*, in: *Jahrbuch für Volks- und Jugendspiele* 23 (1914), Leipzig and Berlin 1914, pp. 110-126, here p. 118.

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