

OLYMPIC PRIDE

The History of LGBT Participation in the Olympics

Introduction

This is adapted from the text used in my blog "The Queerstory Files". During the first half of 2012 I ran a series of posts called "Olympic Countdown" in which I chronicled the history of LGBT participation in the Olympic movement. The text has been adapted, revised and updated.

I have tried to identify as many LGBT Olympians as possible. Most of them were not out when they competed.



GREAT BRITAIN 1612

Perhaps it is appropriate that the Olympics are in the UK in 2012 because it marks the 400th anniversary of the first Olympic games in Great Britain. Yes, the 400th anniversary.

The Great Britain Olympic Committee recognises the Cotswold Olimpycks, first recorded in 1612, as the prelude to the British Olympic movement and emphasised this in its successful bid for the 2012 Olympics. The name "Olimpyck" was first used for the Cotswold games in 1636.

The first Cotswold Olimpycks were organised by Robert Dover (no relation to the present Robert Dover who has competed in more Olympics than any other LGBT athlete). Events included horse riding, wrestling, running, dancing and chess, making them more like the modern Gay Games than the Olympics in the variety of sports.

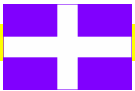
The games were supported by King James I of Great Britain - "Queen" James - who donated a ceremonial costume for Robert Dover to wear at the games. James I was a big fan of sport, writing in 1599 that "certain days in the year would be appointed for delighting the people with public spectacles of all honest games". In 1617 he wrote "The Book of Sports", listing sports permitted on Sundays and Holy Days.

Unfortunately, the rise of Puritanism made the Cotswold Olimpycks increasingly unpopular. Eventually, in 1642, the Puritans established a republic and banned games and celebrations of all kinds (including Christmas). The Olimpycks stopped.

An attempt at a revival occurred in the 1660s. Over the years it deteriorated into an unruly, often drunken, free-for-all. The most recent successful revival of the Cotswold Olimpycks was in 1951 for the Festival of Britain. The games are still held every year during Spring Bank Holiday weekend.

The present International Olympic Committee acknowledges that their origins were influenced by England's more famous Wenlock Olympic games founded by William Penny Brookes in 1859 (Wenlock is the name of one official 2012 mascot). The British Olympic Committee, in its bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games, said:

"The influence of English rural sports, and the work of William Penny Brookes and Robert Dover, have been significant in the development of the Olympic Games philosophy. Almost half the events in the Modern Games are historically connected to British rural sports. Therefore we have a certain arrogant claim and a responsibility to the development of the Modern Olympic Games."

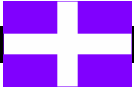


ATHENS 1859

But there was another Olympic revival in Athens in the same year as the first 1859 Wenlock Olympics that is often overlooked. They were the brainchild of businessman Evangelis Zappas who also funded them. Zappas based the games in the Greek capital, and since then the Olympics have been associated with Athens more than Olympia. In addition to two further Olympics funded by Zappas in 1870 and 1875, these are now called the Zappas Olympics.

The 1870 and 1875 games were based at the Panathinaiko Stadium. This was the stadium that was used in ancient times during the Great Panathenean Games. This stadium was enlarged and rebuilt in 140 AD by Herodes Atticus. Herodes built and rebuilt many public buildings. His young lover, Polydeukes, was an athlete who may have attended both the ancient Olympics and Great Panathenean Games. However, Polydeukes died young and Herodes organised a massive funeral games festival for the boy at the Panathinaiko Stadium. When Herodes himself died his own funeral was also held there.

The Zappas Olympics are not recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), even though it benefited from the increased financial input to sport from Zappas himself.



ATHENS 1896

The “official” first modern Olympics were held in 1896. The founding father of these games, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, was a bit of a snob and wanted to hold the first games in Paris. Because Athens was better prepared, thanks to the Zappas Olympics, the IOC went against de Coubertin’s wishes and hosted the first games in Greece. After that de Coubertin did everything he could to stop Greece from hosting the Olympics again. The IOC decided to hold games more often than once in 4 years. So the Intercalated Olympics were formed. These were to be held in between the main games.



ATHENS 1906

The 1st Intercalated Olympics were held in 1906 in Athens and were again based around the Panathinaiko Stadium. Baron de Coubertin objected to the games being held in Greece. His “official” Olympics of 1900 and 1904 were not particularly successful, but the 1906 Intercalated Olympics were a big international hit. De Coubertin wasn’t happy! However, Greek politics and World War I prevented any further Intercalated Olympics from being held, and it wasn’t until 2004 that the Panathinaiko Stadium was used again for the Olympics.

Even though the 1906 Intercalated Games were created and organised by the IOC, such was de Coubertin’s influence and snobbery against Greece that he ensured all medals and world records were later removed from IOC records. This is in spite of the fact that the 1906 games were the first Olympics we would recognise today, with the first ever opening and closing ceremonies, and the athletes’ parade into the stadium behind national flags.



LONDON 1908

It’s difficult to point to any LGBT athlete in any pre-1928 Olympics with any certainty. The earliest possible gay Olympian would have competed at the London 1908 Olympics. He was Danish gymnast Niels Bukh. He had trained hard for the games but, unfortunately, body-fascism raised its ugly head when he wasn’t selected for the Danish team because he was too “thick-set” (too muscular?) and didn’t fit in with the uniform look of the rest of the team! Ironically, fascism was to play an even greater part in his life later.

Determined to turn his Olympic setback to his benefit Bukh became a trainer and changed the style of gymnastics for good. He opened a successful gym school which taught the new methods he developed. More intensive weight-training was introduced, stretching techniques, and something which was unheard of – bodily contact. Gymnasts worked in pairs, doing resistance exercises with each other. Other gyms using his techniques opened across Europe. It seems ironic that the techniques developed by this gay man, who was turned on by young muscular male bodies, turned out so many straight young muscular male bodies.



STOCKHOLM 1912

Bukh was chosen as trainer for the Danish male gymnastics team for the 1912 Stockholm Olympics. They won the silver medal in the Swedish System team gymnastics competition.

During the 1920s and 1930s Bukh’s gyms and training techniques became very popular and successful. But a dark cloud was beginning to gather over the continent and Niels Bukh began to move across to what became the “wrong side”. I’ll return to Niels Bukh when I’ll describe the 2 opposing influences on sport and the modern Olympics at the 1936 Berlin games.



AMSTERDAM 1928

The earliest identified gay Olympic athlete to actually compete is German runner Otto Peltzer at the 1928 Amsterdam Games. He rose to become a hero of the German Olympic movement, only to fall into the depths of persecution under the Nazis. His full story will also be told later.



The WOMEN’S OLYMPICS

Sports organisations have never really accepted that gay men can (or should) do sports. Only by remaining in the closet have they been able to compete. Women athletes too have not always been accepted in sport but their sexuality has made them more identifiable. Way back at the ancient Olympics women weren’t allowed to watch let alone compete (though one woman trained a winning chariot team). The modern Olympics were formed at a time when women weren’t even allowed to vote, but some women were accepted as competitors in sport – as long as it was men who decided which sport. Baron de Coubertin himself refused to allow female athletes at the Olympics, saying it was “impractical, uninteresting, unaesthetic, and incorrect.” Track and field events were definitely not acceptable.

After the 1920 Antwerp Olympics some female track and field athletes requested to be included fully into the 1924 Paris games. The IOC and the International Amateur Athletics Association (IAAF) refused and this led to the creation of the first Women's Olympics.

The Women's Olympics were the brainchild of French athlete Alice Milliat. She created the Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale (FSFI) in 1921 after organising a very successful Women's Olympiad in Monaco. The FSFI organised the first proper Women's Olympics in Paris in 1922, along with another Women's Olympiad in Monaco. The 2nd Women's Olympics were held in Gothenburg, Sweden, in 1926.

Before the 3rd Women's Olympics were held in Prague in 1930 the IOC objected (not for the last time) to the name "Olympics" being used. The FSFI was forced to drop the title and their 3rd games were renamed the Women's World Games. Even though the IOC accepted female track and field events at the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics (against Baron de Coubertin's sexist advice) the FSFI continued to organise its 4th games in London in 1934. A 5th Women's World Games to be held in Vienna in 1938 was abandoned after the FSFI ceased operations in 1936. One of its last decisions at their last congress in 1936 was to call for gender testing in sport to prove sexuality.

The Women's Games featured 3 LGBT athletes, one of whom was to cause a stir in the Olympics.

Mary Weston (UK) competed in the 2nd Women's Olympics in 1926, and, with Zdena Koubkova (Czechoslovakia) competed at the last games in London in 1934. Zdena won the 800m gold medal, breaking the world record. Within 2 years both women had undergone gender reassignment and were living as men and banned from competitive sport.



LOS ANGELES 1932

The third Women's Games athlete became an official Olympian and competed in 1932 in Los Angeles and in 1936 at the notorious Berlin games. She was Polish athlete Stella Walsiewicz (also known as Stella Walsh).

Born in Poland in 1911 Stella's family moved to Cleveland, Ohio, some months later. Except for a brief period in the 1930s this was Stella's home for the rest of her life. She excelled in athletics from an early age, but couldn't compete for the US because she was denied US citizenship until 1947. She chose to compete for Poland at both of her Olympics.

During her career Stella held 18 world records, 8 European records and 3 Women's Olympics gold medals all in short distance running. She became one of the most famous female athletes of all time. Stella won her only Olympic gold medal in her first games and hoped to defend her title in 1936, but the race produced some controversy.

Stella was beaten to the gold medal by American Helen Stephens. The Polish media accused Stephens of being a man and she was subjected to physical inspection. The accusation proved false. However, what happened 44 years later brought a whole new perspective to the incident and put Stella's own reputation to the test.

On a crisp December evening in 1980, 69-year-old Stella Walsh went shopping for party ribbon. As she walked across the dark car park to her car she was ambushed by an armed man. After a brief struggle a gunshot rang out and the man ran away empty handed. Stella slumped to the cold ground, fatally shot. Her death shocked the Cleveland community and the wider sporting world. But her murder was over-shadowed by media reports of the autopsy which revealed Stella had been born with both female and male sex organs. The resulting sensationalist uproar took unnecessary attention away from what is still an unsolved murder.

Stella Walsh's sporting achievements are still recognised, unlike those of Eva Kłobukowska, whom Stella trained for the 1964 Olympics (see below).

Perhaps the most successful female multi-sport champion of all time is Mildred "Babe" Didrickson Zaharias (1911-1956). She is the earliest identified female LGBT Olympian, competing at the 1932 Los Angeles games winning 3 medals in hurdles, javelin and high jump.

Born to immigrant Norwegian parents in Texas "Babe", as she was usually called, started out playing amateur basketball for her employer's team which won the 1931 Amateur Athletics Union (AAU) championship. Moving to track and field in 1932 Babe won 8 events at the AAU track and field championships, breaking 8 world records in the process. Later that year she was chosen for the US Olympic team for Los Angeles, winning 2 gold medals and 1 silver. Her high jump result was controversial. She tied with fellow American Jean Shiley for first place, so the judges ordered a jump-off. They both cleared the same record-breaking height, then the judges decided that Babe's new style of rolling over the bar was illegal. Babe settled for silver medal, but shared the height record. Not long afterwards Babe's "rolling" jump was legalized.

After 1932 Babe Didrickson Zaharias excelled at other sports, particularly golf, becoming a celebrity in the process. In a golfing career spanning 21 years she won 48 professional titles, including 4 US Women's Open titles.

Such was her popularity, versatility and sporting excellence that in 1950 the Associated Press named Babe Didrikson Zaharias as the greatest female athlete of the first half of the 20th century. In 1999 they named her the greatest female athlete of the whole 20th century.



1936 THE HOLOCAUST OLYMPICS

In Olympic history the opposing sides of Nazi idealism come together at the notorious 1936 Berlin Olympics. Two gay men show up the hypocrisy of the Nazis, in that one man became persecuted and another became a Nazi hero.

Otto Peltzer is the earliest identified gay Olympian. He was born in 1900 in Holstein. For a man who was an unhealthy child with a heart defect it is remarkable that he became a European and world record holder in the 800m for 2 years. Whilst studying at university (ironically earning a doctorate in Social Politics) Otto became interested in sport, but for some reason was so embarrassed that he didn't tell his family until he won his first German championship in 1922. After that Otto's athletic career went from strength to strength.

Germany had been banned from the 1920 and 1924 Olympics following World War I (the IOC bringing politics into sport again). Otto was seen as the Great Hope of the German team when the country was allowed back into the Olympic movement and was chosen as team captain for the 1928 Olympics. But an injury sustained in a handball game stopped him from progressing further than the semi-finals.

Four years later Otto was chosen again as German team captain at the Los Angeles Olympics. This time it was the provision of the wrong spikes on running shoes that prevented any German, including Otto, from winning any track medals.

The next year Hitler began his rise to power. The laws against homosexuality were strengthened and vigorously enforced. Otto was arrested in 1935 and imprisoned for 18 months. He was released early, 2 days before the Berlin Olympics began thus denying him any chance to train or prepare. There was also a condition of his early release – that he ceased all involvement in sport. Unfortunately, he took up an unofficial coaching position and was rearrested in 1937. He was kept at Gestapo HQ for 3 weeks before being released and told to never set foot in Germany again.

Otto travelled around northern Europe in poverty for several years. In 1941 the German authorities promised to drop all charges against him and he returned to his homeland. As soon as he set foot on German soil he was arrested and sent to KZ Mauthausen labour camp, where "extermination through labour" led to the huts being known as "The Murder Houses". Otto was to remain there until it was liberated by US troops in 1945.

After the war homosexuality in Germany remained illegal and Otto Peltzer, unlike the Jews, was still persecuted. Finding work as a trainer was difficult and obstacles were deliberately put in his way. It was the rumour of his imminent re-arrest that forced Otto to leave Germany in 1956, using the Melbourne Olympics as the means to escape by taking a job there as a reporter on the games.

Otto remained outside Europe for many years, eventually finding success in India as a trainer and founder of the Olympic Youth Delhi athletic club (now the Otto Peltzer Memorial Athletic Club). Several of its athletes became national champions and Olympic competitors.

Otto survived a heart attack in 1967 and returned to Germany for treatment. During a training session in 1970 with an Indian youth champion Otto Peltzer collapsed and died of another heart attack.

Otto's memory faded, at least outside India, and it wasn't until the 1990s that his sporting achievements began being recognised in Germany. In 1999 the Otto Peltzer Medal was established, awarded only to a select few who have provided distinguished contributions to German athletics.

Previously I mentioned Danish gymnast Niels Bukh, who would have been the first identified LGBT Olympian had his national team decided his strong physique didn't fit in with their team's image. He turned to training and developed his own techniques. Even though he wasn't chosen to compete in 1908 he was coach to the Danish team at the Stockholm Olympics of 1912 which won the silver medal.

In 1920 Niels Bukh opened the first of his gymnastic schools which were to become famous and influential in world gymnastics. Forming a touring display team he went around the world, his gymnasts astonishing spectators with new routines and their musculature, strength and suppleness not seen before. It was a style that has become the standard.

Bukh filled his schools and teams with young farm lads, turning their work-hardened bodies into defined, sculpted hunks who performed shirtless in skin-tight leotards that hid nothing. It was controversial and almost obscene – but it was popular with spectators. But they also attracted the attention of someone else who saw these young studs as perfect examples of the Aryan race – Adolf Hitler. Niels Bukh's homosexuality was an open secret which was overlooked by the Nazis because he was a foreigner and a willing supporter of Hitler and Mussolini.

Bukh's gymnasts were to become an integral part of Hitler's propaganda machine at the Berlin Olympics. Known to be anti-Semitic and anti-Communist Bukh welcomed the invitation to take part with his gymnastic team at the opening ceremony, and photos of Bukh's young men marching into the stadium with swastika flags at a later sporting event is testimony to his willing participation in the propaganda. Afterwards Bukh was awarded one of the Nazi's highest civilian honours, the Service Cross (1st Class) of the Order of the German Eagle. Even though he became a hero of the Nazi regime, in his Danish homeland he was considered a collaborator and traitor.

To finish the Berlin games on a brighter note, the 1936 Olympics introduced one of the most popular and iconic elements of any Olympic Games – the torch relay. At the ancient Olympics the flame was already on site and didn't need to be lit or carried in a relay.

In the modern Olympics the flame was originally (at the 1928 Amsterdam games) just a ceremonial cauldron at the stadium. Hitler's advisers decided to put emphasis on the propaganda that the ancient gods of Olympus approved of the Berlin games by lighting a torch at Olympia itself and carrying it in a relay to the host city. The Berlin Olympics turned it into a ceremonial event that has been enjoyed by millions ever since. It has now come to be a symbol of freedom and diversity with many thousands of relay runners from all sections of society taking part.

Before I leave the 1936 Berlin Olympics there's one more athlete at those games who deserves a mention.

Dora Ratjen (1918-2008) was a German athlete who came 4th in the high jump. In 1938 she won the gold medal and world record at the European championships. But later that year she was arrested because police believed she was man dressed as a woman (a criminal offence at the time). An examination proved that Dora was indeed physically more of a man than a woman, but there was enough reason for doubt to realise why he was declared female at birth. Intersex babies were often more easily identifiable than Dora had been, and his gender had posed a problem to the midwife.

At the trial the judge said that Dora couldn't be found guilty of fraud because he had always been led to believe he was female. Subsequently Dora changed all official documents to show himself as male and adopted the name Heinrich. He agreed to stop participating in sport and returned his European gold medal. In the 2009 film "Berlin 36" Heinrich's experiences in the Olympics were fictionalised to show he was forced to compete as a woman by the Nazis. This has been revealed as untrue.



CORTINA D'AMPEZZO 1956

The Olympics don't have any more positively identified LGBT competitors until 1956 when we reach the Winter Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy. Here we meet our first identified LGBT Winter Olympian, Ronnie Robertson (1937-2000). Ronnie Robertson is the first in a long line of gay male ice skaters, who make up the largest group in an Olympic winter sport (12 positively identified to date, 3 others possible).

In the 1950s three men dominated American figure skating – Ronnie Robertson and the Jenkins brothers, Hayes and David. At the 1956 games they finished 2nd, 1st and 3rd respectively. The competition was so close that the judges took 2 hours to decide there was only 0.007 of 1 point between gold and silver. Having come 2nd behind Hayes Jenkins twice more that winter Ronnie decided to turn professional.

As is often the case with sportsmen Ronnie took up sport as a child to improve his health. By the age of 14 he was US Junior Figure Skating Champion. It was on the US skating circuit that Ronnie met Art Gelien who was a junior pairs skating champion. They became a couple not long afterwards.

Art was also an aspiring actor, and very soon he became much in demand in 1950s Hollywood, and from his earnings he helped to finance Ronnie's training. These earnings were quite substantial. Art acted under the stage name of Tab Hunter - he was the biggest teen idol of the 1950s with millions of teenage girls swooning over him (and quite a few teenage boys doing the same in secret).

Art accompanied Ronnie to the 1955 World Championships and the subsequent world tour. At the 1956 Olympics Ronnie won the silver medal. I am unsure if Tab Hunter was there as support. Their relationship petered out after that. Ronnie Robertson died in 2000 at the age of 62.



MELBOURNE 1956

Later in 1956 the Olympics moved south of the equator for the first time for the summer games in Melbourne, Australia. One competitor was 17-year-old American swimmer Susan Gray, the earliest surviving LGBT Olympian. Susan is said to have competed in the 1960 Rome Olympics as well, though she is not mentioned in the official records. What gives Susan another place in the history of LGBT Olympics is her involvement in the Gay Games.

At the first Gay Games in 1982 the games founder, Tom Waddell, persuaded two fellow Olympians to take part. One was hammer thrower George Frenn (who was straight), and the other was Susan Gray (by then Mrs. Susan McGreivy). George and Susan acted as torch bearers at the opening ceremony.

Susan McGreivy was a lawyer by profession, by 1984 working for the American Civil Liberties Union. It was in this capacity that she was involved in the long battle between the Gay Games and the US Olympic Committee over the use of the name "Gay Olympics", which is how the games were originally marketed. I'll return to this legal battle later.



INNSBRUCK and TOKYO 1964

Ondrej Nepela (1951-1989) is the youngest ever LGBT Olympian, appearing in the 1964 Innsbruck games only a week after his 13th birthday. Even at that young age he was good enough to become the Czechoslovakian national skating champion that same year, a title he held every year (except 1969) until he retired in 1973. In 1965 he won his first European championship medal, a bronze, aged 14. His career was truly remarkable, and future successes must place him high in the LGBT superstar ratings.

At the 1964 summer games in Tokyo Canadian swimmer Marian Lay made her Olympic debut. She was another teenage athlete being only 15 at the time, the youngest ever female LGBT Olympian. Young Marion finished 5th in the final of the 100m freestyle, a race won by the legendary Dawn Fraser in the first under-1-minute finish (Dawn Fraser has been at the centre of several rumours about her sexuality but all are unfounded). Also in 1964 Marion Lay became the Canadian 100m freestyle champion. Before her next Olympic appearance in 1968, as well as being Canadian 100m freestyle champion every year in between, Marion won the gold medal in that distance at the 1966 Commonwealth Games in Kingston, Jamaica.

Also at the Tokyo games was Polish sprinter Ewa Kłobukowska. She was trained by Stella Walsh, the Polish-American Olympic sprinting champion whose unsolved murder in 1980 revealed her to be intersex. Ewa won the bronze medal in the 100 meters, and she was a member of the 4x100m relay team that won gold. The same relay team went on to win further success in the European Championships in 1966, but then the IOC decided to ban Ewa from sport and demand she return her medals. The reason? The new gender tests that had been introduced in 1967.

Ewa is one of those people who are born with "one chromosome too many". Her condition meant that the IOC test recorded her as male. What must have hurt most was the humiliation of this straight woman having her gender and, by implication (in the press), her sexual orientation discussed in public. Ewa's exact genetic condition was never revealed, but she proved the IOC testing was wrong by giving birth to a boy in 1968 – women who fail the IOC test don't have the physical means to conceive a child.

To add insult to injury the IOC demanded that Ewa should return all the Olympic medals. As part of a relay team you'd think that her exclusion from the medal record would apply to the whole team. If Ewa, as a "male", gave her an unfair advantage over other female athletes then it gave the whole team an unfair advantage as well. But, no. The IOC said Ewa's relay team-members could keep their medals.

GENDER TESTING

Gender testing in sport has always been controversial. It was in the 1960s that gender testing of athletes began to have a major effect – some good, some bad – in many sports.

First of all it should be made clear that failing a gender test doesn't make a woman a lesbian. Several women who failed the test, like Ewa Kłobukowska, have had an otherwise comfortable straight life-style. What qualifies them for inclusion in the broad LGBT community is their genetics – the part of their body carrying the information which says they are female AND male.

The chromosomes in every body cell contains all the DNA needed to create YOU. Only one determines gender. This gender chromosome has 2 types called XX and XY. Only the XY chromosome carries the gene "switch" which turns an embryo into a male.

You inherit half of your gender chromosome from each parent. The halves join together to form a new gender chromosome in 1 of 2 possible combinations that will determine YOUR gender – XX for a girl and XY for a boy. I inherit my X chromosome from my Mum, and my Y chromosome from my Dad. My sister inherits one X chromosome from both.

When an embryo is big enough the male gene in an XY chromosome "switches on". After that male hormones are produced. Like Pass the Parcel these hormones pass the "male message" on to receptors, which they pass on to the DNA. If all goes to plan the embryo develops into a bouncing baby boy.

Sometimes the hormone receptors don't work properly and don't pass on the "male message". It's as if the music in the Pass the Parcel stops and the parcel stays where it is but the music goes on. With no "male message" from the Y "switch" being passed on the embryo goes into "default" mode and develops into a bouncing baby girl.

The X half of the gender chromosome is the "default" mode. Women are born with a XX gender chromosome. They don't need both to develop into a female, so one of them folds in on itself to become a Barr Body. The IOC gender test was developed to detect this Barr Body under a microscope. If an athlete has one then she is a woman. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, some women develop in "default mode" when their inherited Y "male message" doesn't get passed on. The IOC cannot find a Barr Body so the female athlete is classed as male.

Sometimes the receptors stop working well into the development process and the baby is born with both partly-formed male and female sexual organs. These individuals have been called hermaphrodite or intersex. With more understanding of the biological processes in recent years new medical names have been given, such as Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome.

In the 1960s there was a lot of talk about some female athletes from eastern Europe being men and had taken performance enhancing drugs. The IOC introduced gender tests in 1967. Almost immediately some very successful female athletes "retired", the most famous being the sisters Tamara and Irina Press. Between them they had won 5 Olympic gold medals. Whether they retired to escape the gender test or the improved drug test will probably never be known.

The first athlete banned by the IOC was world champion skier Erika Schinegger. She was preparing for the 1968 Winter Olympics when she failed the new gender test. Schinegger retired from sport and became transgender. Erik Schenigger appeared on an Austrian television programme in 1988 to give the World Championship gold medal he had won as Erika in 1966 to the silver medal winner.

The first Olympian to fail the test was the 1964 relay champion Ewa Kłobukowska. Her story is told above.

Spanish hurdler María José Martínez-Patiño was permitted to compete in the 1992 Olympic trials for the Barcelona games, but only after years of protest. She failed the gender test at the 1988 World University Games. After having 3 years of her personal life discussed, and away from competition too long, María was unable to qualify for selection on her home team on home soil. She retired, and has since earned a doctorate in political and sports sciences and is Professor at the Faculty of Education and Sports Sciences at Vigo University, Spain.

Other female athletes have failed the IOC's test but most were allowed to compete, including Edinanci da Silva who competed for Brazil in judo in Atlanta 1996. In 1999 the IOC dropped the Barr Body gender test, though kept the right to test in certain individual cases. Most recently the case of Caster Semenya created a lot of media attention after her success at the 2009 World Athletics Championships. In 2010 she was cleared to continue competing and was accepted onto the South African team for London 2012. But in 2011 the IOC announced they would start testing women for "higher than natural testosterone levels".



GRENOBLE and MEXICO CITY 1968

Returning to the chronological history of lgbt participation at the Olympics we reach the 1968 Winter Olympics in Grenoble. Seventeen-year-old Ondrej Nepela returned to improve on his 22nd placing at the 1964 games. He had won bronze in the European Figure Skating Championships but couldn't reach higher than 8th in Grenoble. Perhaps he would do better at his next Olympics.

At the summer games held in Mexico City was Canadian swimmer Marion Lay. Even though she was the Commonwealth Games and Canadian 100m freestyle champion, Marion just missed out on medal by coming 4th in the Olympic final. However, she did win a bronze with the 4x100m freestyle relay team.

Like a lot of sportspeople Marion became a media commentator after retiring, working for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation until 1973. She also founded WomenSport International and the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sport among other organisations. Marion also became a member of the Canadian Olympic Committee and served as Chair of the Vancouver 2010 Bid and as a director of the Vancouver 2010 Organising Committee. It was probably of mutual benefit to both Vancouver and Marion that her partner, Jenny Ballen, was head of Vancouver's civil administration at the time.

One sport which might surprise you to learn has a lot of lgbt competitors at the summer Olympics is equestrianism. The first of these competitors to get through an Olympic trial was Mason Phelps jr. of the USA. But he was only chosen as a reserve member for the 3-Day event team, who went on to win silver medals, and didn't compete. In 1972 Mason became a trainer and equestrian event manager. He founded Phelps Media Group in 2001 which has been involved in media coverage of Olympic equestrianism.

There's no doubt that the most significant LGBT presence at the 1968 Olympics was US army doctor Tom Waddell. Tom was to become more well-known as the founder of the Gay Games.

Even though he ranked 5th in the world in the decathlon before Mexico Tom only managed 6th at the games themselves. Tom Waddell's Olympic career could easily have ended in Mexico. Perhaps the most memorable image to come out of these games is that of American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos making the Black Power salute on the medal podium. The IOC regarded this as a political act and gave them a life-time ban from the Olympics. Tom Waddell was one of hundreds of athletes who expressed support of Smith and Carlos, and Waddell was threatened with being sent home and court-martialled. In the end no action was taken and he left the army a few months later.

With his medical qualifications from the army Tom began to combine his love of sport with being a physician, championing a healthy gay lifestyle that was to become a challenge in the difficult years that were to hit the gay community. His work as a physician led to his return to the Olympics in 1976 – but not as a competitor.



SAPPORO 1972

There's a distinct aquatic feel to the two Olympics of 1972 – both solid and liquid. We'll start with the Winter games in Sapporo, Japan. One of the most eagerly awaited competitions was the men's figure skating. The Czech, European and World champion, Ondrej Nepela, was hoping it would be 3rd time lucky and that he would add Olympic gold to his impressive cabinet of 11 championship wins. And he was still only 21.

Seemingly without effort Ondrej succeeded in winning his Olympic gold, and decided that this would be his last year in competition. However, he was persuaded to stay on because the 1973 World Championships were to be held in his home city of Bratislava. Ondrej knew that he wanted to retire at the top of his game, and he finished his career in Bratislava by retaining his Czech, European and World Championships. He then toured with "Holiday on Ice" for 13 years and turned to coaching. He died of AIDS in 1989 aged 38.

Also at the Sapporo games was Canadian skater Toller Cranston. Whether they had much contact off-ice isn't known, but by the 1973 World Championships Toller and Ondrej Nepela were having a short affair. There as well was future champion John Curry of Team GB. I'll be saying more about him later

Like Ronnie Robertson before them, these skaters kept their sexuality secret, but at the next Winter Olympics one of them found himself at the centre of media attention which threatened to ruin his performance.



MUNICH 1972

Moving on to the summer games held in Munich we think immediately of the murder of the Israeli athletes. But it is also the year that Mark Spitz broke all records by winning 7 gold medals in the pool. The only identified LGBT athletes in Munich also competed in the pool – Mark Chatfield and Peter Priedekker in swimming, and Scott Cranham in diving.

American Mark Chatfield didn't win any medals in Munich, but he did finish in 4th position, set an Olympic trials record in the 100m breaststroke, and was the reigning Pan American Games champion. Mark's life out of the pool couldn't have been more of a contrast. Always musically minded he earned a reputation as a talented cellist, composer and singer, being composer in residence at St. Cyril of Jerusalem church in Los Angeles. In 1993 he co-founded Musica Angelica, a chamber orchestra on whose recordings he performed. He is the only Olympian to win a Grammy award. Mark continued to swim in US Masters competitions winning many medals and in 1994 he won 6 gold medals, 1 silver and 1 bronze at the Gay Games in New York. He died aged 45 in 1998 of lymphoma.

In the same Munich Olympic pool was Peter Priedekker of the Netherlands. He was actually brought up in South Africa, but because that country's apartheid laws banned them from the Olympics (the IOC imposing its own version of keeping politics out of sport – they still admitted countries that didn't allow female athletes) Peter returned to the Netherlands in order to qualify. After competing in the Olympics Peter moved to the UK ("following a man" according to all accounts) and has lived here ever since. He never gave up swimming and joined London's Out to Swim team, with whom he has competed at 5 Gay Games winning 18 gold medals.

A different pool sport – diving – brings our first LGBT diver to the Olympics, an event brought to the fore of LGBT sport in more recent years by Greg Louganis and Matthew Mitcham. Canadian-born Scott Cranham lived in the USA during his childhood. At the age of 14 he won the 3 meter springboard title in the 1969 US Diving Championships. Moving back to Canada he earned a place on the national diving team in 1972. He didn't perform well, but he improved enough to win a gold medal at the 1974 Commonwealth Games in New Zealand. An ankle injury sustained in a parachute jump then threatened to put him out of competition for good.

Between them, Mark, Peter and Scott have won 27 gold medals at the Gay Games.



INNSBRUCK 1976

Less than 12 years after hosting the 1964 Winter Olympics Innsbruck found itself doing so again after the appointed host city, Denver, withdrew because of financial problems and public opposition from Texas tax-payers.

The big hero of winter sport at the time was John Curry (1949-1994). He had risen from near-obscurity since his last Olympic appearance in 1972. It was his balletic approach to skating that caught the public imagination.

Curry's Olympic career actually began in 1968. He was placed on the reserve list for the British team going to the Grenoble Olympics. Four years later he made it onto the team proper in Sapporo, Japan.

It was at the 1976 Innsbruck games that John Curry became a household name worldwide. He went into the games as British and European champion, with the added honour of being chosen as flag-bearer at the opening ceremony. As favourite to win gold Curry was confident of victory. Then, after completing his gold medal-winning routine, barely off the ice for more than a minute, he was handed a German press article.

The following day the press was full of this "interview" with John Curry at which he "came out as gay". No such interview took place. Denying it would have been pointless, so a press conference (with no press present!) was arranged by British team officials to put across Curry's response. What is significant about the affair is that Curry's skating ability drowned out the more sensational reports, even in the traditionally homophobic Daily Mail. His sexuality didn't end his career, as many other gay athletes have experienced.

No-one had been "out" at the Olympics before, and Curry seriously thought of pulling out of the up-and-coming World Championships to avoid creating too much of a distraction. As it happened no such distraction surfaced, and Curry ended his competitive career in 1976 as British, European, World and Olympic champion.

As a 15-year-old in the UK, I was certainly unaware of any adverse press coverage on Curry's sexuality. What mattered more was that he'd won an Olympic gold medal. The only change it made to Curry himself was that he didn't wear stage make-up in the Olympic ice gala at the end of the skating competition in case people said he looked effeminate (he'd always worn make up before without anyone making any remark).

When he arrived back in England Curry was received like a hero. Four months later he became the first LGBT Olympian to be honoured for his contribution to sport. He was awarded an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours list of June 1976. No-one cared that he was gay. That is, not until the glare of his Olympic win had faded. After moving to America to escape media intrusion Curry was diagnosed with AIDS and returned to England. He died in 1994.

John Curry's artistic interpretations inspired the skater who stood to his left on the medal podium. Bronze medal winner, Canadian skater Toller Cranston who was making his 2nd Olympic appearance. Such was the appeal of the new Curry/Cranston style of artistic figure skating that the actual skating of ice figures was dropped in 1990 leaving just the musical programmes.

Curry and Toller both turned professional in 1976. They performed successfully in ice shows and tv specials, working together in the ice ballet "The Snow Queen" in 1982. Following shortly after Curry's OBE Toller was awarded the CM (Member of the Order of Canada) in 1977. Toller Cranston is now a successful artist and painter.

I'll not call pairs skating a "team" event as such, but if I did the Innsbruck games would have its first LGBT team competitor in Randy Gardner. With skating partner Tai Babilonia Randy was US Pairs Skating champion going into the Olympics and they had high medal hopes. Unfortunately they finished 5th, the same position they reached at the World Championships the following month. Every year until the next winter games Randy and Tai were US pairs champions, and World champions in 1978. It seemed nothing could stop them winning gold at the next winter Olympics.



MONTREAL 1976

After the terrorist attack at the 1972 Munich games the Montréal Olympics saw a heightened level of security. In part this contributed to the financial problems the city encountered afterwards. But the competition at the games was still top class and is, along with the Innsbruck winter games, perhaps the games that got me interested in multi-sport events. I still have the scrapbooks of newspaper cuttings.

Four LGBT athletes took part in Montréal, all of whom would appear at the Gay Games. First of all is Dr. Tom Waddell, the Gay Games founder. Having competed in Mexico City in 1968, Tom became a physician, and it is in the capacity of team physician to the Saudi Arabian team that he found himself in Montréal.

Also returning to the games was Canadian diver Scott Cranham. As I mentioned above Scott received an ankle injury while parachuting that threatened to end his career. Thankfully, a change of coach led to an improvement in fitness and

even though he hadn't fully recovered Scott made the national team for Montréal. Finishing a disappointing 14th place he managed to achieve world 8th ranking in 1978. Hopes of a better Olympic performance ended in 1980 with the Canadian boycott of the Moscow Olympics. After that, Scott turned to coaching and is currently High Performance Director with the Canadian national diving team and, no doubt, will be at the London games. Outside the Olympics Scott has 4 Commonwealth Games medals and 6 Gay Games medals.

The Montréal Games saw the first identified LGBT competitor in a full team sport, the captain of the home country's volleyball team Betty Baxter (Ewa Klobukowska was part of a relay team in 1964, which I class as a team event rather than a team sport – Ewa also competed solo in the same sport). The volleyball team finished disappointingly in last place having lost all their matches. However, because there were only 8 teams competing they still qualified for Olympic Diplomas (awarded to all top 8 finishers in every final).

Betty Baxter was made coach of the Canadian national volleyball team in 1979. She missed out on returning to the Olympics in 1980 because of the boycott and perhaps she would have been at the 1984 Olympics if it hadn't been for the homophobia of sport officials. In 1982 media reports about Betty being a lesbian was the reason she was fired.

Undaunted, Betty went on to be co-founder of the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sport with fellow Olympian Marion Lay. As a competitor Betty took part in volleyball at the San Francisco 1986 Gay Games, winning a gold medal with Team Vancouver. In 1990 on home soil she won a silver at the Vancouver Gay Games, again with Team Vancouver. A respected advocate of LGBT issues in sport and the community Betty Baxter became the first out lesbian to run for public office in 1993. At the Vancouver Centre elections Betty came 4th with 15% of the vote.

A more familiar face and name debuting at the Montréal Olympics was US diver Greg Louganis, perhaps the best diver in history.

Greg got into diving through gymnastics. His childhood was dogged by prejudice against his racial background, his interest in dance and his dyslexia. With his own struggles accepting his sexuality diving was the only outlet for his personality. And it saved his life. After several suicide attempts Greg's diving proved to become exceptional and he easily earned a place on the US diving team for the Montréal games. He was 16.

The big surprise, perhaps with hindsight not such a big one, was Greg winning the silver medal on the 10 meter platform. After that it was to be gold all the way. Needless to say, I'll mention his in future Olympic posts.

Despite the financial problems the city encountered because of the games, the Montréal Olympics were very successful. However, that was to change, with the next summer games being used once more for propaganda purposes.



LAKE PLACID 1980

The Winter Olympics of 1980 was the calm before the storm.

The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. It was universally condemned. Even as early as New Year 1980 some countries were talking about boycotting the Olympics that were to be held in Moscow that summer. At the Winter games in Lake Placid, USA, no serious threat of a boycott emerged and the games suffered little.

Once again it was the ice arena that saw LGBT competitors taking part. American pairs skaters Randy Gardner and Tai Babilonia returned. They were World Champions and favourites for the gold medal. The practice sessions went well, but then Randy suffered a groin injury during the warm-up that was too serious for him to continue. To the disappointment of the whole world the couple pulled out of the competition.

Turning professional after that removed all hope of an Olympic gold. However, their popularity and iconic status as great as that of Torvill and Dean was proved when they skated together again in the very same Olympic ice stadium in Lake Placid at the 25th anniversary reunion of the 1980 US Olympic team. Needless to say they got a standing ovation when they stepped onto the ice. Randy and Tai had continued to be involved in professional skating. Randy even choreographed a skating sequence for an episode of "Beverly Hills 90210", and for "Skating with Celebrities" in 2006.

Performing solo on the ice in Lake Placid was Canadian champion Brian Pockar. Disappointingly he finished 12th, but his creative talents were utilised in a much bigger arena at the 1988 Winter games in Calgary.



MOSCOW 1980

The mass boycott of the games in Moscow was a great disappointment for many athletes, both for those who competed and those who didn't, including divers Scott Cranham and Greg Louganis whose national teams "ordered" them to stay away. Other countries, like the UK, supported the boycott but left the actual decision to boycott to individual athletes.

Not wanting to be denied the chance to compete some boycotted track and field athletes took part in the Olympic Boycott Games in Philadelphia, USA. Unlike his fellow team member Scott Cranham, the Canadian national champion middle-distance runner Greg Duhaime did have a chance to compete. He finished 3rd in the 5,000m. Unfortunately, Greg only finished 16th at his only official Olympics in 1984, and he died of AIDS in 1992 aged 38. Other sports, such as equestrianism, also held their own boycott games.

The International Olympic Committee has always had its own definition of the word “politics”. While claiming to separate sport from politics they still insist on athletes belonging to national Olympic organisations run by politicians and governments, and on only allowing national flags (i.e. flags representing political governments). The only effort ever made by the IOC to remove politics from sport has been to allow athletes to parade behind neutral flags, as most of the athletes at the opening ceremony in Moscow did. South Africa was banned from the Olympics for many years because of apartheid laws, but the IOC have turned a blind eye to countries who discriminated on other political or human rights grounds (e.g. inclusion of women athletes). Even in 2012 the IOC are guilty of sexual discrimination – they refuse to let men compete in synchronised swimming.

One member of the UK team was barrister Terence Etherton. He was selected for the 1980 fencing team but his name doesn't appear in the official list of those who competed in Moscow. This suggests that he boycotted or was a non-competing member. Terence made history in 2001 when he became the first LGBT Olympian to be knighted, and he became the first gay Lord Justice of Appeal in 2008.

Of course, Communist-run countries didn't boycott the games – except China. In the Cuban swimming team was Rafael Polinario, a member of the national team since he was 14. Although he finished 11th in Moscow he won gold medals in the 100m and 200m freestyle at the Pan-American Games in Cuba in 1982.

Rafael's life follows that of many gay men in that period. He lived in an environment where his sexuality could be a reason used against him to prevent him from competing. Being a high profile celebrity in Cuba he hid his sexuality by marrying a Cuban national synchronised swimmer and fathering a daughter, Ann. Rafael and his wife separated soon after Ann was born, and after the Cuban head coach questioned his association with various “anti-socials and homosexuals” Rafael decided to defect. This he did in Canada.

Continuing to swim and coach once asylum was granted Rafael joined Toronto's gay swim and water polo teams which competed at the first World Outgames in Montréal in 2006. Through coaching his disabled daughter Ann, Rafael had an opportunity to coach swimmers for future Olympics.



The GAY OLYMPICS

Between the 1980 and 1984 Olympics a new Olympics emerged. It was the brainchild of US Olympian Tom Waddell. After his participation as team doctor to the Saudi team in 1976, Tom returned home to San Francisco where he and his boyfriend came out publicly in the October 1976 issue of “People” magazine. They received much abuse from fellow Olympians, but it gave Tom the determination to show that gay men CAN do sport.

It was while attending a gay bowling match that the spark of an idea of a Gay Olympics occurred to him. He travelled around the US drumming up support and enthusiasm and very soon a group had been formed to arrange the first games in 1982. But before they could begin the US Olympic Committee sued the group over the use of the word “Olympics” (where have I heard that before?). Tom protested that no-one had ever objected to the Police Olympics, the Deaf Olympics, the Dog Olympics, or the Porn Olympics, so why pick on the Gay Olympics?

Legal proceedings started, and with less than 19 days before the games began all references to “Olympics” had to be blacked out on posters and publicity. The legal battle was to last until 1987, by which time the Gay Olympics had been renamed the Gay Games. From such an unpromising start grew a movement which is still going strong, and still holds the world record for the most competitors in a multi-sport event (over 4,000 more than the biggest Olympics).



SARAJEVO 1984 and CALGARY 1988

Two Winter Olympics for the price of one now. At the 1984 Sarajevo and 1988 Calgary games the same 3 gay ice skaters appeared – Rob McCall, Brian Orser and Brian Boitano.

Rob McCall was a pairs figure skater who was Canadian champion 7 years running from 1981. Performing with Tracy Wilson in the Sarajevo Olympics of 1984 he finished in 8th place. At the Calgary games in 1988 they won the bronze medal.

In 1990 Rob was diagnosed with AIDS. He kept this secret because US law at that time banned anyone with HIV/AIDS from entering the USA, and Rob wanted to continue touring in ice shows and competitions. Rob died in 1991 aged 33.

Even as his health deteriorated he planned an AIDS benefit called "For Skate the Drama". It was also to become his tribute event.

At that time there was a lot of denial within the sport. Many skaters either disbelieved there were many HIV+ skaters, or chose to ignore what effect AIDS would have on the sport. With several major skaters dying of AIDS, more and more skaters chose to show their open support by appearing at the AIDS benefit.

One skater who performed at "For Skate the Drama" was American Brian Boitano. In 1978 he had won a bronze medal at the World Junior championships. One place behind was Canadian Brian Orser. The two were to become Olympic rivals, both competing against each other in Sarajevo in 1984 and Calgary in 1988.

Boitano won silver in 1984 while Orser came 5th. At the World Championships over the next 4 years they dominated the medals, alternating gold and silver positions 3 years running. At the 1988 Olympics the media hyped up the "Battle of the Brians". Going into the final free skating section the 2 Brians were effectively tied – whoever won this section won gold. Orser made one mistake and missed a jump, giving Boitano the gold medal.

No doubt this was a disappointment for Orser. But at least he had the honour of carrying his national flag at the head of the home team at the end of the parade of athletes at the opening ceremony. Orser's participation in Olympic skating continued. At the 2012 Vancouver games Orser coached the gold medallist Yu-Na Kim.

Boitano's career, however, went in several directions. Sports-wise he returned to the Olympics in 1994. On the tv he earned cult status in caricature form on "South Park"; he won an Emmy for his role in "Carmen on Ice"; and has fronted 2 series of his own cookery programme.

Before we leave the 1988 Calgary games there's some more lgbt names to mention. Former Olympian Brian Pockar was artistic director of the closing ceremony, at which k d lang made the first of two Olympic performances, and Nat Brown was the coach and head technician for the US ski team.



LOS ANGELES 1984

The Los Angeles Olympics sees the first significant presence of lgbt athletes, albeit none of them "out" at the time. From 1984 the number of lgbt athletes would increase until it peaked in Sydney in 2000. Because of this it will be difficult to include full details of all of them.

After the boycott of the Moscow Olympics its no surprise that Communist countries boycotted the LA games, East Germany included. It's well-known that eastern European countries systematically drugged athletes purely to win more medals and promote Socialist propaganda. Most of the drugs were steroids and testosterone given to female athletes, most of them unaware they were being drugged.

In 2000 the president of the East German Olympic Committee was put on trial with others and were convicted of "intentional bodily harm of athletes". One of these was East German shot putter Heidi Krieger. By the time of the trial he had undergone gender reassignment and was known as Andreas Krieger. Even though he had questioned his own sexuality as a child he firmly believes that being pumped full of steroids denied him the right to discover his sexuality naturally. Despite not appearing at the Olympics Krieger won the European Championships in 1986 and the gold medal forms part of the Heidi Krieger Medal, awarded each year to the German athlete who has done most to promote anti-doping in sport.

In Los Angeles two American lgbt athletes became Olympic champions. Harriet "Holly" Metcalf was a member of the US rowing 8 team that won gold, and Greg Louganis returned to be the first male diver since 1928 to win gold in both springboard and platform.

A member of the US swimming team, Bruce Hayes, won his first championship the year before at the US Championships, the World University Games and the Pan American Games. In the Olympic 4x200m freestyle relay Bruce found himself swimming the same final leg against the legendary West German swimmer Michael Gross. The US were ahead as Hayes and Gross entered the water. Gross overtook before the final turn. Bruce's trademark fast finish put them equal at the finish line. In a world record time, and only 0.04 seconds ahead, Bruce Hayes won gold for the US team. "It was an honourable defeat", said Gross.

Bruce has continued to swim in US Masters competitions, and in 1994 became the first and so far only Olympic champion to become Gay Games champion. Since then he has won as further Gay Games 15 gold medals, competing at every games since 1994. He also kept his Olympics connection by being Assistant Competition Manager for Swimming at the Atlanta 1996 games. In 2002 Bruce was appointed a Gay Games Ambassador.

On track and field in 1984 we have the first lgbt couple to compete at the same games, West German athletes Sabine Braun and Beate Peters. Neither won a medal but did win diplomas – 6th place heptathlon diploma for Sabine and 7th place javelin for Beate.

Finally, one gay athlete made his Olympic debut in 1984. Equestrian Robert Dover, a member of the US dressage team, went on to compete in 5 more Olympics, the most by any lgbt athlete.



SEOUL 1988

The Seoul Olympics of 1988 were first to return to some form of normality, with only 3 countries supporting North Korea's boycott.

It was also the first Olympics when we really begin to see the variety of sports that lgbt athletes participate in at a high level – track and field, rowing, cycling, equestrianism, diving, swimming and tennis (4 sports with more than 1 competitor). Even though 13 lgbt athletes in total competed, none of them were out at the time. Returning to the games were Robert Dover, Beate Peters and Greg Louganis.

Greg is remembered more for his accident than becoming the first diver to win springboard and platform gold twice. While competing in the finals he hit his head on the springboard. What the public and officials were not aware of was that earlier in the year Greg had been diagnosed HIV+. No precautions were taken to stop the pool, doctors, officials or fellow divers from being infected from his bleeding wound.

With hindsight keeping his HIV status secret seems irresponsible, but at the time the AIDS crisis and general homophobia within sport scared Greg into silence. On the other hand, was it right to assume Greg was straight and not infected and should the IOC not have taken precautions anyway? It wasn't until 1995 that Greg admitted he was HIV+, only a year after coming out publicly at the Gay Games in New York.

Away from the controversy was a welcome addition to the 1988 Olympics after being a demonstration sport in 1984. After an absence of 60 years tennis was reintroduced to the games. IOC rules on the participation of professional athletes allowed the inclusion of many professional tennis players at the Olympics, and they form the largest group of female lgbt Olympians, 6 of them being Wimbledon champions.

The first lgbt tennis Olympian was Jana Novotná. In 1988 Jana was earning a reputation as an emerging star of the doubles circuit, winning the US and Australian Opens the same year. In the Olympic final Jana and partner Helena Suková were beaten to gold by Zina Garrison and Pam Shriver.

Moving back to the pool we have future Olympic champion from Canada Mark Tewksbury making his debut. He was to create ripples in more ways than one, as we shall see later. But for now the ripples he was making were silver ones. Mark was Commonwealth Games backstroke champion, a stroke he excelled in. At the Olympics he could only finish in 5th place in the 100m backstroke, but he did win a silver with the 4x100m medley relay team.

Competing against Mark in the 200m backstroke was American Dan Veatch. Dan finished in 7th place in the final while Mark finished 4th in the B final (12th place overall). Dan Veatch went on to compete in the Gay Games, winning 13 gold medals.

The remaining lgbt athletes were all making their Olympic debut. They were Sherri Cassuto (USA, rowing), Patrick Jeffrey (USA, diving), Brian Marshall (Canada, athletics), Inger Pors Olsen (Denmark, rowing), Craig Rogerson (Australia, diving), and Petra Rossner (East Germany, cycling). I'll be saying more about some of these in the future.



BARCELONA 1992

Things were really heating up at the Barcelona Olympics in 1992, in more ways than one. The heat of the host city was uncomfortable at times as the athletes gathered. And so much had changed in the world since 1988 – Germany was united, apartheid in South Africa was abolished, and the USSR and Yugoslavia had disintegrated into separate new states. New nations made the competition more interesting.

And the voice of Freddie Mercury was everywhere. Specially written in 1988 for the games Freddie's song "Barcelona" became a games anthem, even helping to create a popular tourist attraction as accompaniment to the dancing fountains of the city which were specially renovated for the games. Sadly, Mercury, who was due to perform the song at the opening ceremony with Montserrat Caballe, died of an AIDS-related illness 8 months beforehand.

Yet again, more lgbt athletes took part – 13 active competitors in 9 sports. Only one athlete was "out" at the games, Jana Novotná. She had come out publicly in 1991 during the Australian Open and arrived in Barcelona hoping to improve on her silver medal from 1988. Again she played in both singles and doubles, but failed to get to the quarter-finals.

Two other lgbt Wimbledon champions had better luck - Gigi Fernandez and Conchita Martínez. Even though competing officially for the first time, Gigi had taken part in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics when tennis was a demonstration sport. In Barcelona Gigi and her tennis partner Mary Joe Fernandez beat Wimbledon champs Martínez and Arantxa Sánchez Vicario to the gold medal in the women's doubles.

Another gold medal went to swimmer Mark Tewksbury in the 100m backstroke. To this he added a bronze in the 4x100m medley relay. Mark's involvement in the Olympics continued after Barcelona. He was an athlete representative on the IOC but resigned in 1998 over corruption within the movement. After a bribery scandal surrounding the awarding of the 2002 winter games to Salt Lake City Mark became prominent among many Olympians who called for reform. Reform did indeed come about. Today Mark is looking forward to London 2012 as Chef de Mission of the Canadian national team.

Mark became involved in another sporting controversy in 2004 when the Federation of Gay Games and the organisers of the 2006 Gay Games in Montréal argued over financial control. The Federation dropped Montréal and gave the games to Chicago. Offended by this insult to their city the Montréal organisers set up a rival games – the World Outgames. Mark Tewksbury was appointed co-president.

The last lgbt gold of 1992 went to Petra Rossner of Germany. She was the reigning World Champion in the 3km pursuit track cycling event, and it was in this that she won gold. At about this time she started dating fellow cyclist Judith Arndt who made her Olympic debut, but they didn't compete on the same team until Sydney in 2000.

Two lgbt silvers were won in 1992. First, the macho world of boxing produced Canadian Mark Leduc. Starting out of the wrong side of the law, jailed for 6 years aged 15 for armed robbery, he was able to pursue his passion for boxing in prison. After his early release he won several Canadian championships. After Barcelona Mark turned pro for a year then retired. He came out in tv documentary in 1994 and became a familiar face on Toronto's gay scene. Mark died in 2009 in a Toronto sauna, apparently of heat-stroke.

The other silver went to New Zealand's equestrian Blyth Tait, who also won a bronze. Three other gay equestrian men were in Barcelona: Robert Dover, in his third games, who also won a bronze; for the UK Carl Hester competed, and the Canadian team was managed by Peter Tayler.

The two remaining medals were bronze – German heptathlete Sabine Braun, and Dutch judoka Irene de Kok, in her only Olympic appearance. To name-check the other lgbt athletes – Craig Rogerson (Australia, diving) and hockey players and life partners Alyson Annan (Australia) and Carole Thate (Netherlands).

An innovation which only really took hold in Vancouver at the winter Olympics of 2010 was a Pride House. In Barcelona it was unofficial and organised by local lgbt community groups. It proved very successful with over 1,000 people visiting every day. It wasn't until the 2012 Vancouver Winter games that we will see the first sanctioned Pride House, a centre for all lgbt athletes and supporters.

One former Olympian brings the first lgbt influence to the Paralympics in Barcelona in 1992. Ex-Cuban swimming champion Rafael Polinario competed in the 1980 Moscow Olympics. He defected to Canada in the 1980s and became involved in the Canadian national paralympic team. He coached many swimmers with disabilities in Toronto, and the first of these to compete at the Paralympics was Elisabeth Walker in Barcelona. Elisabeth went on to compete in 3 further games and will be in London later this year.

Rafael continued coaching, and in the early 1990s succeeded in persuading her disabled daughter Anne to get out of Cuba and move to Canada. She, too, was to become a Paralympian – the only Olympian with an lgbt Olympian parent.



ALBERTVILLE 1992 and LILLEHAMMER 1994

For the first time since 1952 the Winter Olympics don't have any lgbt figure skaters when they take place in Albertville in 1992. Instead we have a biathlete and a speed skater.

American biathlete Joan Guetschow is one of the earliest Olympians to compete openly as a lesbian (Jana Novotná competed as an open lesbian at the summer games later that year). Joan was well down in the results in 1992, but she came back in 1994 to Lillehammer and came 8th in the 7.5 km relay. As with other top 8 finishers in a final she received an Olympic diploma. What is even more remarkable is that inbetween her Olympic appearances Joan underwent heart surgery for a congenital defect. This and her open sexuality made an inspiring story for the media to catch on to.

Even with no figure skaters in Albertville the ice introduced another lgbt skater to the Olympics with Belgian speed skater Geert Blanchart. He finished 6th in the 1000m. He returned in Lillehammer 1994 but was disqualified in the first round. Later that year he did win a silver medal – in in-line skating at the Gay Games in New York (he also competed at the Gay Games in 1998).

Another speed skater in Lillehammer 1994 was American Christine (or Chris) Witty. I admit that I don't have definitive information regarding her sexuality and I've only seen her named on a couple of lists of LGBT athletes. Chris earns a special place in the history of Olympians in that she's the only LGBT athlete to compete in both winter and summer games.

LGBT figure skating returned at the 1994 Lillehammer games. Making his final Olympic appearance was American figure skater Brian Boitano. After the "Battle of the Brians" at the 1988 winter games in Calgary Brian turned professional. But after a while he wanted to return to the Olympics but the rules on professional athletes at the games prevented him from realising his dream. With other professional athletes he lobbied the IOC and sports organisations for several years to change the rules.

The lobbying proved successful. The IOC changed their rules to allow several Olympic sports to admit professionals as "eligible" competitors. That's how Olympic tennis and basketball acquired so many high-profile professionals. For Brian Boitano it meant that he too could compete in 1994 in Lillehammer. Unfortunately, he missed his favourite triple axel combination jump for the first time in his life and had to make do with an Olympic diploma for 6th place.

Also in 1994 the Gay Games were held in New York to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. For the first time in history the multi-sport event overtook the Olympics in size. In New York 10,864 took part compared to 9,356 at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics and 10,318 at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

Competing in New York was Olympic champion swimmer Bruce Hayes. He became the first and only Olympic champion to become Gay Games champion. Other medallists were Olympians Mark Chatfield and Peter Pridjckker. Also there in New York were Olympic boxing silver medallist Mark Leduc and diving champion Greg Louganis, both making their first official "coming out" appearance.



ATLANTA 1996

The 1996 Atlanta Olympics currently holds the record for the most LGBT medals – 6 gold, 4 silver and 11 bronze. Of these only 4 were individual medallists – tennis player Jana Novotná (bronze), swimmer Daniel Kowalski (2 silver, 1 bronze), and cyclists Michelle Ferris (silver) and Judith Arndt (bronze). However, we do see team sports with LGBT members growing in number.

Since her last Olympic appearance Jana gained some notoriety by crying on the shoulder of the Duchess of Kent when she lost the 1993 Wimbledon final. Also in tennis Gigi Fernandez won her 2nd gold medal in women's doubles. Conchita Martinez, having been beaten by Gigi in the semi-final, won bronze by winning the 3rd place match.

Australian Daniel Kowalski, in his Olympic debut, became the first swimmer in 94 years to win medals in three distances – 200m, 400m and 1500m freestyle.

The remaining medallists from Atlanta played in team or pairs sports. In fact team players formed the majority of LGBT athletes in Atlanta (this includes some who also competed individually, e.g. cycling, swimming and equestrianism).

The first team sport is hockey. In the 1992 Barcelona games Alyson Annan played in the Australian national team. They also won the World Hockey Cup in 1994 and the Australian Team of the Year award 3 years running. At the Atlanta games Alyson and the team won gold. Alyson was awarded the Order of Australia earlier that year. Winning bronze in women's hockey was the Netherlands, of which Alyson's future life partner Carole Thate was a member.

Women's football made its debut in Atlanta, providing 3 players and 1 reserve – the most competitors in one sport that year. Pia Sundhage played for Sweden, but Norway had 2 players, Bente Nordby and Linda Medalen. They beat Brazil to win bronze. Saskia Webber was a reserve member of the US team.

Two members of the gold-medal-winning Danish handball team share the same surname but are not related – Anja and Camilla Andersen. Both have handball in their genes with their parents being national handball players, Anja's father also being an Olympian.

Sheryl Swoopes won the first of her 3 consecutive Olympic gold medals with the US basketball team.

The diving pool provided 3 athletes – the Americans Patrick Jeffrey and David Pichler, and Swede Jimmy Sjödin. At the time David was embroiled in a long-running disagreement between the national diving coach and David's partner Steve. Accusations of interference in David's training against both sides resulted in Steve receiving a restraining order. Whether this affected David's diving or not is difficult to tell, but he only managed 6th place in the final.

Patrick Jeffrey finished 3 places behind David. When he retired from competition in 1999 Patrick became the diving coach at Florida State University and coach to the national team, coaching David Pichler for the 2000 Olympics.

Blyth Tait, the New Zealand equestrian rider, won 2 medals, an individual gold and a team bronze. The remaining medals were all team bronzes – Natalie Cook (volleyball, Australia), and US equestrians Robert Dover and Guenter Seidel.

Brazilian judoka Edinanci da Silva was one of seven athletes to fail the gender test that year, but they were all allowed to compete as women. Edinanci was born with both male and female sexual organs and had always felt more female than male. Then, in 1996, just 3 months before the 1996 Olympics, she completed surgery to become completely physically female. Even though Edinanci is one of those women who have a male Y chromosome (see my section on gender testing) the IOC accepted her as female and she has competed at every Olympics up to 2008.

I can't leave the Atlanta Olympics without a mention of the bombing of Centennial Olympic Park. Even though the bombing of the lesbian bar the Otherside Lounge in Atlanta occurred 7 months after the Olympics had finished, the same bomber was responsible. It was a hate campaign that claimed the death of 2 people.

On 27th July 1996 a bomb exploded in Centennial Olympic Park, killing one and injuring 111 others. The following January an abortion clinic was targeted, and after the Otherside Lounge another abortion clinic was bombed. The bomber, who had a personal anti-globalisation agenda, was a member of a Christian extremist sect with an anti-abortion and anti-gay agenda.



NAGANO 1998

Only two sports had LGBT athletes competing at the 1998 Winter Olympic in Nagano, Japan – speed skating and ice hockey.

Marieke Wijsman first skated competitively in 1988 at the age of 13. In 1996 she became Dutch champion in the 1000 metres. Marieke was also the first female skater to compete internationally in clap skates. It was the Dutch women's national team who first used the skates in 1996. These are skates that aren't fixed rigidly along the sole of the boot but hinged at one end so that the blade has longer contact with the ice. Soon the rest of the world followed suit and because of the increased efficiency on the ice dozens of world records were smashed by clap-skate wearers in Nagano.

American speed skater Chris Witty made her second Olympic appearance in Nagano. She improved on her 23rd position in 1000m at the 1994 games by winning silver. She also won a bronze in the 1500m.

The Nagano Olympics saw the introduction of women's ice hockey, and it is in this sport that the other 3 LGBT athletes competed. Nancy Drolet had been a member of the Canadian women's ice hockey team since 1992. That year the team won the World Championships and Nancy was named Athlete of the Year by the Canadian Sports Council. The team won the world championships twice more before the Nagano Olympics and three more times afterwards. At Nagano Nancy and the Canadian team won the silver medal. Nancy retired from the national team in 2004.

In the round robin stage of the tournament the Canadians beat the Swedish team. Playing for Sweden was Erika Holst and Ylva Lindberg. Even though they didn't win a medal they finished in 5th position.

For only the second time since 1972 there were no identified LGBT figure skaters competing in the winter Olympics. That doesn't mean they had no influence on the competition.

Brian Wright (1959-2003) was one of the top choreographers in figure skating who influenced many others. It was watching the 1968 Grenoble Winter Olympics that inspired Brian to take up skating. Even though he came 2nd in the US national novice championships and was tipped for a place on a future Olympic team Brian chose choreography instead of competition. He did, however, create medal-winning routines for top skaters, most famously Michael Weiss.

Brian realised his dream of seeing Michael compete at the 1998 Olympics. In 1995 he didn't know how much longer he had to live because he had been HIV+ since 1986. He was always open about it and was a leading figure in promoting AIDS awareness within his sport. During the Nagano Olympics CBS broadcast a profile of Brian's choreography of Michael Weiss's routines.

AIDS hit figure skating quite hard in the 80s and 90s. Four Olympic figure skaters died of the disease – Ondrej Nepela (1989), Rob McCall (1991), John Curry (1994) and Brian Pockar (1995). In the US alone 40 top skaters died of AIDS up to 1993. Brian Wright lost his battle with the disease in 2003.



SYDNEY 2000

The Sydney Olympics of 2000 were the gayest ever! As well as an impressive 42 LGBT athletes the closing ceremony could not have been more camp! Even though 42 is an impressive number, only 8 were out publicly at the time.

Leading the LGBT medal table was the host nation. Defending her gold medal was hockey player Alyson Annan. During the games she and her husband, Argentinian Olympic hockey player Max Caldes, split up. It was in this tournament that Alyson became friends with a rival player Carole Thate of the Netherlands. They had both played against each other 4 years previously, with the same result – gold for Australia, bronze for the Netherlands. Retiring from competition Alyson moved to Holland where she and Carole married in 2005.

The Australian beach volleyball player Natalie Cook dominated the competition with her volleyball partner and they won the gold. They became Members of the Order of Australia in the following honours list. Natalie went on to compete twice more at the Olympics.

Other Australian medallists were Daniel Kowalski (gold, swimming), and Ji Wallace (silver, trampoline).

Returning to go one better than a silver medal from 1996 was cyclist Michelle Ferris. Competing on home soil added extra pressure of national attention. Michelle was up against her old rival from France Felicia Ballanger but could only manage silver again. The nation's disappointment disappeared when Michelle said that the only important thing was that she had beaten her personal best time – but at least they shared a new Olympic record.

Although retired from elite competition, Michelle continues to take part in Masters events and the Gay Games. She became a Gay Games Ambassador in 2008, and competed in the Cologne games in 2010 winning a gold and silver medal.

The Danish handball team successfully defended their gold medal. This competition saw for the one and only time in Olympic history a married couple playing against each other – Camilla Andersen (Denmark) and Mia Hundvin (Norway). They registered their partnership earlier that year and played in a preliminary round match against each other on 17th August (Norway won 19-17). Mia and the Norwegian team went on to win bronze. Their relationship, however, didn't last long and they divorced in 2003.

When you think which sport would have the most LGBT competitors and medals in Sydney which would you say? Swimming? Beach volleyball? In fact, the combined contingent of both of these is less than the actual top sport – equestrianism (8 competitors, 6 medals). Ironically, when Australia last hosted the Olympics in 1956 horses were subject to strict quarantine and the equestrian events were held in Stockholm.

British equestrian Lee Pearson made his debut and instantly entered the record books as the first gay paralympian, and finished the games with another record of being the only LGBT athlete to win 3 gold medals at one Olympics. Lee was to keep breaking records at all of his subsequent Olympic appearances.

Always open about his sexuality he often jokes that he'd come out of the closet long before he told his parents just before his 21st birthday! Born in 1974 with a muscular disorder Lee was bundled by the nurses into a cot in a broom closet fearing that his distorted body might upset other young mums. Lee's mother soon ordered them to bring him out of the closet and onto the wards.

Horses are in Lee's blood – his great-grandfather was the local horse-whisperer. As a child he Lee wasn't allowed to have a BMX bike like his brothers, so his parents bought him a donkey to ride around the yard on. Lee's love of riding began from that moment. Lee first attracted national attention in 1980 when he was given a Children of Courage Award by Mrs. Thatcher (who carried him up the staircase in 10 Downing Street to the ceremony). It was the 1996 Atlanta games that inspired Lee to begin competing as a Paralympian.

One remarkable incident occurred at the medal ceremony of the team dressage. Of the 12 people who received medals, 3 of them were men – and all of the men were gay. They were Robert Dover and Guenter Seidel (both USA, bronze) and Arjen Teeuwissen (Netherlands, silver).

Two other riders, Robert Costello (USA) and Carl Hester (GB) came 8th in their respective events. The remaining riders are particularly note-worthy in that they are the first male couple to compete at the same games.

New Zealander Blyth Tait was one of the best known riders. At his first Olympics in 1992 he won 4 medals. His partner was Paul O'Brien. The pair met in the UK where they both went to train. The Sydney Olympics looked good for Blyth and Paul. Blyth was chosen as team captain and carried their national flag at the opening ceremony. Unfortunately, his first horse died in quarantine and both his 2nd horse and Paul's horse were withdrawn injured. The best result either of them reached was 8th place in the 3-day event team competition. After Sydney they kept up their Olympic connection – Blyth was equestrian team manager in 2004 and Paul was an Olympic selector.

The women's football competition also saw a couple of medals. On the gold medal-winning Norwegian team was Bente Nordby. In the semi-finals they beat Germany, who then beat Brazil to win the bronze. On the German team was the 1999 German Female Footballer of the Year, Inka Grings, while German substitute goalkeeper Nadine Angerer didn't get a medal because she didn't play in the bronze medal match.

The remaining LGBT medals went to Sheryl Swoopes (basketball gold); Swedish high jumper Kajsa Bergqvist (bronze), and Dutch swimmer Johan Kenkhuis in the 4x200m freestyle relay (bronze).

Lisa-Maria Vizaniari, one of the few out athletes at the games, was a Commonwealth gold and silver medallist discus thrower. She was coached by her girlfriend Michelle Reeves but only reached 8th place, as she had in 1996. Lisa-Marie has since given up the discus and taken up boxing.

Making his Olympic debut on home soil was a gay man called Mathew who soon became Australia's top diver. No, not Mitcham, but Helm. Mat Helm competed in both individual and synchronised events though didn't reach higher than 5th place. By his next Olympics he was world champion.

Of the 7 LGBT Wimbledon champions to have been Olympians only 3 haven't won medals - the Australian doubles players (and one-time life partners) Rennae Stubbs and Lisa Raymond, and, surprisingly, Martina Navratilova. Lisa debuted in 2004, but for Rennae this was her 2nd games. With her then doubles partner she went out in Round 2. However, she and Lisa won the Wimbledon doubles title the next year. Other Wimbledon champions in Sydney were Conchita Martínez and Amélie Mauresmo, neither of whom got past the quarter-finals.

In the athletic stadium was Swedish long jumper Peter Häggström and German heptathlete Sabine Braun in her 5th and last Olympics. She finished in 5th place. In the pole vault competition was fellow German Yvonne Buschbaum, the reigning European Junior Champion. In 2007 he announced his retirement from sport and began gender reassignment. He adopted the name Balian and became a pole vault coach.

Edinanci da Silva, the Brazilian judoka who underwent surgery to enable her to compete at the 1996 Olympics, returned but lost in the semi-finals. At the other end of the weight categories American Lauren Meece went out in Round 1.

In the cycling competition partners Judith Arndt and Petra Rossner took part, though not in the same race. Another cyclist was Chris Witty, becoming the first and only LGBT Olympian at both the summer and winter games. She finished in 5th place in the 500m time trial, helping to break the Olympic record.

In the pool we had Francilia Agar of Dominica and David Pichler of the USA. The US diving coach was former Olympian Patrick Jeffrey. In the Paralympic events was swimmer Anne Polinario of Canada. She was trained by her father Rafael, who is the only LGBT Olympian to be parent of another.

Three other LGBT athletes debuted in Sydney – German fencer Imke Duplizter, Swedish footballer Victoria Svensson, and South African hockey player Marilyn Agliotti.

To end the games Sydney put on the campest closing ceremony ever. Centre stage was gay icon Kylie Minogue. Also performing was Darren Hayes with Savage Garden. But what raised a few eyebrows, and quite a lot of criticism from some Australians, was the appearance of 50 drag queens accompanying the eponymous big bus from the film "Priscilla, Queen of the Desert".



SALT LAKE CITY 2002

Before looking at the sporting achievements at the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City we have to look at the one of the blackest incidents in Olympic history.

Long before the Salt Lake City games began they were surrounded in scandal. The city had been awarded the games in 1995, but in 1998 it was revealed that the leaders of the city's bid committee had offered gifts (and possibly bribes) to IOC members in return for votes. Very quickly the bid committee leaders resigned, followed by many more, and 4 independent investigations began. Even though the bid leaders were charged with bribery and fraud by the US Department of Justice, they were acquitted in December 2003.

The scandal shook and shocked the IOC. Many voices within the organisation were critical of the way this was allowed to happen and called for a complete change in the voting rules. Among the leading voices of discontent was former Olympic champion Mark Tewksbury. He resigned from his position on the IOC Athlete Representative committee in protest, and was supported by many other Olympic athletes who thought the same. The IOC took a serious look at their rules and drew up a new set that restricted future bid committees and voting members from dealing in "gifts".

The Salt Lake City games were given a new organising committee and they took on the additional responsibility of rebuilding trust and confidence. Putting the scandal behind them the committee succeeded in producing what was one of the most successful (and most profitable) games.

The LGBT contingent in 2002 was led by Chris Witty, who won the gold medal and a world record in the 1 km speed skating event. Next comes Dutch speed skater Renate Groenewold in her Olympic debut. She won the silver in the 3 km event. Renate's compatriot Marieke Wijsman could only reach 17th place in her event.

In the women's ice hockey competition the Swedish team won the bronze medal. Team members included Erika Holst and Ylva Lindberg, who both came out as lesbian in 2006.

Finally on the ice was Canadian figure skater Emanuel Sandhu. Like Chris Witty Emanuel's name is creeping into online lists of LGBT athletes without any personal confirmation, but like Chris he is openly gay-friendly. Emanuel had never reached lower than 2nd place since his first Canadian championships in 1997, and this would have qualified him for the 1998 Nagano Olympics but he wasn't selected. In Lillehammer he was forced to withdraw with an injury.

Still out on the slopes was Swedish Alpine skier Anja Pärson making her debut. She would go on to win more medals than any other female LGBT Olympian, 6 in all, but only one gold. In Salt Lake City Anja won a silver and a bronze. And in part this was thanks to gay American Nat Brown, who was ski technician to both the Swedish and German teams. He had previously coached the US team at the 1988 Calgary Olympics.

Before the next Olympics in the summer of 2004 the IOC made their first proper ruling on transgender athletes. The rule stated that an athlete's gender at birth should not be a bar to being accepted as a competitor in any sport as a different gender. Although it was very long way from stating at which point during transition would the reassigned gender be recognised, it was still more recognition than was then being given by other sports organisations.



ATHENS 2004

The Olympics returned home in 2004 when they were held in Greece. These were the first games where the LGBT media began to list LGBT athletes. Society had at last started to get used to the idea that there are LGBT athletes and the LGBT media was now proud to point some of them out.

There was only one identified LGBT athlete from the home nation, tennis player Eleni Daniilidou. She debuted in Sydney in 2000 at the age of 17. Eleni had reached No. 22 ranking in the world in 2002 but never reached higher, despite having several championship wins.

As in 2000 equestrianism tops both the LGBT athlete and medal lists. And once again British Paralympian Lee Pearson tops the individual table defending all 3 golds he won in 2000. Three American riders won bronze. Robert Dover, in his 6th and last Olympics, won bronze in the mixed team 3-day event with Guenther Seidel. Darren Chiacchia won bronze in the mixed team 3-day event. This was Darren's first Olympics and a series of major setbacks prevented him from returning.

First was a horrific accident 6 months before the Beijing Olympics when Darren's horse tumbled over a fence and fell on top of him. With multiple fractures, a punctured lung and severe head injuries Darren was in a coma and on a breathing ventilator for about a week. His doctors didn't envisage a full recovery. But Darren stunned them by recovering enough to climb back on a horse 2 months later. With steely determination Darren returned to competitive riding in 2009.

Then in 2010 Darren's partner had him arrested for not telling him he was HIV+. In Florida, where they lived, this was illegal. Very quickly this "outing" turned into a bigger personal setback as inaccurate media reports of him being "the Olympian who gave a man AIDS" lost him thousands of dollars in endorsements and business deals. Eventually all charges against Darren were dismissed in September 2011.

The other equestrian athletes were Carl Hester (GB) and Blyth Tait (New Zealand).

Second to equestrianism comes tennis with 6 LGBT players, all except the above-mentioned Eleni Daniilidou were Wimbledon champions – Conchita Martínez, Amélie Mauresmo, Rennae Stubbs, Lisa Raymond, and (in her only Olympic appearance) Martina Navratilova, at 47 the oldest ever LGBT competitor.

Amélie knocked out Conchita in the first round and went on to win the silver medal. But Conchita went on to win a silver in the doubles tournament. One-time life partners and Wimbledon doubles champions Rennae Stubbs and Lisa Raymond returned, but because Lisa is American and Rennae is Australian they couldn't compete together. They didn't even get to play against each other. Both Rennae and Lisa (with her doubles partner Martina) went out in the quarter-finals.

Gold medals were won by life-partners Lotte Kiaerskou and Rikke Skov who played in the Danish women's handball team.

Diving also produced 2 medals, both won by the Australian diver Mat Helm – a silver and bronze. Also in the pool were paralympic swimmers from Canada coached by former Olympian Rafael Polinario, including his daughter Anne who won 2 gold medals and 3 silver.

Sheryl Swoopes won her 3rd successive gold medal with the American women's basketball team, becoming the top female gold medallist.

The remaining medallists of 2004 were German fencer Imke Duplitzer (silver) and Dutch swimmer Johan Kenkhuis (silver). Top German cyclist Judith Arndt also won silver – and a fine for giving the finger sign as she crossed the finish line as a protest against her partner Petra Rossner being dropped from the team.

Nadine Angerer returned as substitute goalkeeper for Germany's women's football team, but again missed out on her team's bronze medal by not playing in the bronze medal match. They beat the Swedish team, on which Victoria Svensson played.

Australian beach volleyball star and former Olympic champion Natalie Cook lost to Brazil in the semi-finals. Another beach volleyball player, South African Leigh-Ann Naidoo, unfortunately lost all her matches.

Finally, judoka Edinanci da Silva returned but didn't improve on her placings from 2000, and Britain's Rob Newton (from my home county Nottinghamshire) finished 7th in his heat of the hurdles.

One athlete who didn't make Athens was Hungarian wrestler Grego Szabo. Just before the games his team managers discovered he had "performed" in many gay videos and banned him for life!



At the Olympic games in Turin which saw more LGBT winter medallists than at any other – 3 gold, 3 silver and 2 bronze.

At the opening ceremony there was a great chance for well-known Italian fashion designers like Armani to showcase their skills. He designed the official Italian team uniform and the glittering dress worn by Carla Bruni. In the opening ceremony Chris Witty carried the Stars and Stripes ahead of her team. This was her 3rd Olympic appearance in 4 years, and she hoped to defend her speed skating gold medal from 2002. Unfortunately, she finished in 27th place.

Perhaps one of the big surprises in Turin involved two other speed skaters – Renate Groenewold and Ireen Wüst of the Netherlands. Renate was hoping to improve on her silver medal from 2002. The 3000 meters was her favourite distance, the distance in which she has won most of her medals. However, in Turin Renate was up against newcomer Ireen Wüst, who beat Renate into silver medal position. Ireen was considered an outsider in the event, and at the age of 19 she was the youngest Dutch winter Olympic champion on record. Ireen also won a bronze medal in the 1,500m event.

Turin saw Swedish skier Anja Parson returned to improve on her medals from 2002. After winning a bronze on the slalom in Salt Lake City Anja became Olympic champion by winning gold in Turin. She also won a bronze in the combined event.

Sarah Vaillancourt is the third gold medallists from Turin. Canadian by birth Sarah moved to study in the USA entering Harvard University in 2004. She made the Canadian national ice hockey team in 2005 and took a year off from Harvard to train for the Turin games. In the final Sarah and the Canadians beat Sweden. In the Swedish team were Erika Holst and Ylva Lindberg, both making their 3rd appearance. By winning silver they improved on their 2002 bronze medals.

More figure skaters appeared in Turin than at any games since 1988 – 3 of them. Emanuel Sandhu returned, hoping his 2nd place in the previous Canadian championships would help him to win an Olympic medal after the disappointment of pulling out injured in 2002. Unfortunately, he finished 13th.

In 5th place was American figure skater Johnny Weir making his Olympic debut. Between these games and the next speculation about his sexuality seemed to interest the media more than his skating. He always stated that his sexuality, whatever it was, was irrelevant and private. By the next winter games the Canadian media in particular were becoming a bit too persistent and somewhat derogatory about Johnny's flamboyant style.

The American Ryan O'Meara made his only Olympic appearance in 2006 despite having been a competitive pairs figure skater since 1999. Ryan began training with new partner Jamie Silverstein in 2005 and the pair won bronze at the US Championships. Their Olympic results were not so good, finishing 16th overall. Afterwards Ryan retired from competitive skating and became a coach.

Having gone through all the known LGBT athletes, one final LGBT competitor cannot be named. This athlete was (and still is) a captain in the US army, and the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" regulation, which meant that anyone serving in the American forces would be fired if their homosexuality was admitted, prevented the captain from coming out. The regulation has since been abolished and, as yet, the captain still hasn't come out publicly. The captain competed in the bobsleigh competition and finished in 6th place. I do know this Illinois-born athlete's identity, but won't reveal it.



Going into the Beijing games the LGBT media again attempted to list the LGBT Olympians competing in 2008. Their highest estimate was 11, but with some athletes coming out since then the list can now be recorded as 28, of which 15 were making their Olympic debut.

This time around women's football tops the LGBT athlete list with 7 players. For the 3rd Olympics in a row Germany won the bronze medal. In the team were Linda Bresonik and Nadine Angerer. Nadine missed out on a medal in the previous 2 Olympics because she was the substitute goalkeeper and didn't actually play in the bronze medal match. But this time she was head goalkeeper and at last received her bronze medal. Unfortunately, Ursula Holl, her substitute, thereby missed out on a bronze.

One player with football in her blood was Isabell Herlovsen, a striker on the Norwegian team. Her father is Olympian and former Norwegian international Kia Erik Herlovsen.

The gold medal was won by the USA. They were coached by Pia Sundhage who had played for Sweden in the 1996 Atlanta games. On the Swedish team in Beijing was Jessica Lindström. Perhaps the most unusual record of any LGBT Olympian has to be held by American football forward Natasha Kai - the record for the most tattoos – over 55 in all!

Handball had 3 lesbian players. In the gold medal-winning Norwegian team were Katja Nyberg and team captain Gro Hammerseng. The pair had been living and working openly as a couple for 3 years and had sought to play for clubs in which they could play alongside each other. Gro had the honour of carrying her national flag in the closing ceremony. Katja was actually Finnish by birth and she became a Norwegian citizen in 2001. The couple have since split up, though they continued to play on the same club until 2011 when Gro retired to have a child.

Alexandra Labracère played handball for France, losing in a first round match to Norway but reached the quarter-finals, where they lost to Russia.

Lee Pearson returned to defend his 3 paralympic equestrian gold medals for Team GB. On 11th September 2008 he became the greatest LGBT Olympian when his total gold medal tally reached 9. Who knows – will he make it 12 in 2012? In the main equestrian arena Hans Peter Minderhoud won a silver medal. His life-partner Edward Gal was not selected but made it onto the team for 2012. The New Zealand couple of Blyth Tait and Paul O'Brien did not compete, but Blyth was the equestrian team manager for the Kiwis in Beijing, and Paul was an Olympic selector.

Winning the gold medal in women's hockey was the Netherlands, with Maartje Pauman and Marilyn Agliotti. Marilyn returned after an absence of 8 years to play for the Netherlands after playing for her native South Africa in 2000.

In the diving pool were "the two Ozzie Mats" – Helm and Mitcham. Mathew Helm was making his 3rd Olympic appearance. He had won a silver and bronze at the 2004 Olympics and 2 golds in the Commonwealth Games in 2006. He was tipped for 2 golds in Beijing. However, rising superstar Matthew Mitcham, who had come 4th in the Commonwealth Games, exceeded most people's expectations by beating Helm to the gold in the platform competition. Disappointingly, Helm missed any medal.

The US women's basketball team, with Seimone Augustus, became Olympic champions. The remaining medals from Beijing went to Lauren Lappin and Vicky Galindo who won silver with the American softball team. Vicky's involvement in the Olympics actually goes back to 1996 when, at the age of 12, she took part in the torch relay for the Atlanta games.

Of the remaining LGBT athletes in Beijing 4 were making their 4th appearance: "veteran" German cyclist Judith Arndt, Australian beach volleyball player Natalie Cook, Brazilian judoka Edinanci da Silva and Australian tennis player Rennae Stubbs. A tennis player making her only Olympic appearance was Israel's Tzipora Obziler.

German fencer Imke Duplitzer made her 3rd Olympic appearance. She refused to attend the opening ceremony saying that she didn't want to be part of the "circus" of a Chinese propaganda spectacle. Canadian swimmer Anne Polinario was also making her 3rd appearance, coached by her father, gay Olympian Rafael Polinario. Anne defended her Paralympic 50m gold medal.

Making their debut were the first LGBT triathletes at the Olympics - the French pair of Carole Péon and Jessica Harrison (born in Sheffield).



LGBT involvement in the Vancouver Olympics began when they bid for the games in 1998. The first Chair of the bid committee was Vancouver-born Olympic bronze medallist Marion Lay. She competed in Tokyo 1964 and Mexico City 1968. The pressures and demands of being Chair led to Marion leaving the post before the bid was won, but she remained involved as the Vancouver city representative on the Organising Committee's board of directors. The IOC recognised Marion's contribution to sport in 2001 by awarding her the Women and Sport Trophy for the Americas.

These definitely felt like a more gay-friendly games – except when it came to American figure skater Johnny Weir. Speculation about his sexuality had been circulating since his first Olympics in 2006. His performances were flamboyant and regarded by some as almost too camp. The Canadian media in particular thought this was enough of a reason to discuss Johnny's sexuality on air. To his credit Johnny brushed most of this aside, rightly saying that his skating was the only thing that was important at the games. That's a feeling echoed by many.

Johnny couldn't quite reach his 2006 5th place, finishing 6th. It wasn't until January 2011 that he came out in his autobiography. But he wasn't the only athlete in Vancouver who came out shortly afterwards.

New Zealand speed skater Blake Skjellerup made no attempt to hide his boyfriend in the athlete's village. Being out was relatively new to him. He had come out to his family only the previous September and, like Johnny, decided his skating performance was more important in Vancouver. Fortunately, having a gay uncle and cousin meant his family were supportive.

Blake's best result in Vancouver was 16th place, having reached the quarter-final of the 1,000 meters. Once the games were over Blake felt comfortable enough to come out publicly the following May, the first to do so after Vancouver 2010.

Also in speed skating were 3 Dutch skaters – Renate Groenewold, Sanne van Kerkhof and Ireen Wüst. Sanne was making her Olympic debut and had been the partner of Ireen since the previous May. They didn't compete against each other, however, because Sanne competed in the short track events and Ireen in the longer distances.

Johnny Weir wasn't the only identified lgbt figure skater in Vancouver, because previous Olympic silver medallist Brian Orser was choreographer and coach to the female champion skater Yu-Na Kim.

Naturally, the Canadians had high hopes of gold in the ice hockey tournament. The women's team succeeded in holding on to their gold medals from Turin, again with Sarah Vaillancourt on the team. In the semi-finals they beat Finland who went on to beat Sweden for the bronze medal. Erika Holst made her 4th appearance in the Swedish team.

The only other lgbt gold medal in Vancouver was won by Vibeke Skofterud, the Norwegian cross-country skier. This was a personal triumph for Vibeke after recovering from an eating disorder which stopped her from competing in 2006.

Also on the ski slopes Sweden's Anja Pärson hoped to defend her slalom gold medal but crashed out near the end. She escaped serious injury and the following day won bronze in the combined, as she did in the previous games. This was her 6th Olympic medal, giving her the most medals of any female lgbt Olympian – 1 gold, 1 silver, 4 bronze (though all 3 of Sheryl Swoopes' medals were gold).

Two Pride Houses were set up, by gaywhistler.com and the Vancouver Queer Resource Centre. A previous attempt to provide a special gathering place for lgbt Olympians to relax and be themselves was in Barcelona 1992. With the Vancouver games being centred around a well-known gay ski resort at Whistler it was natural that the community there should set up a Pride House there. Whistler had been the home of Gay Ski Week since 1993.

Both Vancouver Pride Houses were very successful and influenced the decision by community groups to set up a Pride House in London 2012 and Sochi 2014. The Sochi house has been banned by the Russian courts because of its alleged bad influence it would have on children. The London Pride House will go ahead after being rescued with support from Pridesports UK, the European Gay and Lesbian Sports Federation and the Federation of Gay Games.



LONDON 2012 – Before the Games

London won their bid to host the 2012 Olympics on 6th July 2005. Almost immediately plans were laid to make these games as diverse and gay-friendly as possible. The London committee were the first in Olympic history to include a commitment to diversity in its bid.

One of the first decisions made by the London Organising Committee (LOCOG) was to form a Diversity and Inclusion Group, appointing an openly gay man, Stephen Frost, as its head. Former basketball player John Amaechi is a member of this diversity board.

Perhaps the biggest expression of outreach to the lgbt community came in July 2010 when they produced special pin badges showing the Rainbow Pride flag flying proudly behind the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic logos. More recently a new badge was designed showing a rainbow heart behind the logos. Ironically, LOCOG are quite zealous in their attempt to stop people from cashing in on the games by using Olympic symbols, colours and associated words, but LOCOG have made no attempt to give financial recompense to the lgbt community by cashing in on the Rainbow Pride flag by using it on their badge.

When it came to recruiting volunteers for the games LOCOG appealed to all diverse groups and communities to become involved. Self-appointed spokesman for the lgbt community, Peter Tatchell, actively pushed LOCOG into ensuring a high

visibility of the LGBT community at the opening and closing ceremonies. Was he thinking of a recreation of the Sydney Olympics closing ceremony with Priscilla, Queen of the Desert, and 50 drag queens?

The 70,000 or so volunteers were given a test before the games began to gauge their sensitivity to diversity issues. In the UK this sort of thing is commonplace because of our anti-discrimination laws. Questions included one on how the volunteer would deal with people complaining about 2 men holding hands, or how to direct someone to the toilet when they're not sure what gender they are. The test has been thought patronising by some, but I know from experience that there are people out there who wouldn't have a clue what to do in either situation.

But the Olympics is about sport. What about the athletes? LOCOG has done the unique thing of including LGBT visitor information in their "Athletes Guide" handed out to all competitors. There have been appeals by some MPs for visiting LGBT athletes to come out at the games, and even seek asylum here if returning home would mean they would be persecuted, tortured or even executed because of their sexuality.

Something which that may appear at every future Olympics is a Pride House. In recent years LGBT organisations and volunteers have set up special venues for LGBT athletes, allies and families to meet and socialise. These have been very well received and high-profile. It is often forgotten that the first attempt was in Barcelona in 1992.

Almost as soon as London won their bid plans were made to open a Pride House, quickly followed by similar plans for the next winter games in Sochi, Russia, in 2014. However, it came as no surprise to hear that a court in Russia has banned the Sochi Pride House because of its alleged effect it would have on local children. The London Pride House fell victim to current financial circumstances with difficulties finding enough sponsorship and funding.

And then, with only 16 days to go, the London Pride House was saved. Organisations including the Federation of Gay Games and the European Gay and Lesbian Sports Federation joined Pride Sports UK in rescuing the Pride House. It has also received official support from LOCOG.

CARRYING THE TORCH WITH PRIDE

The ancient Olympics never had a torch relay, but there were torch relays in other parts of Ancient Greece. The most important of these took place in Athens during the Greater Panathenaeon Games. The modern torch relay was created for the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Since then many thousands of people have carried the torch. It will be impossible to identify all the LGBT torch-bearers, though I have listed in chronological order below those I have found.

Some of the torch-bearers are famous LGBT Olympians while others have worked hard to promote diversity in sport and the community. In the following list I give the Olympic year and venue first, then the name of the torch-bearer and a little biodata, and lastly the location and date of their part in the torch relay.

1996 Atlanta

Vicky Galindo, Olympic silver medallist 2008 (USA softball); location and full date unknown.

2004 Athens

Daniel Kowalski, Olympic gold medallist (Australia swimming); Melbourne, Australia, 5 June 2004.

2008 Beijing

John Caldera, San Francisco Veteran Affairs Commission member, US Navy veteran, the first Mr International Bear 1992; San Francisco, 9 April 2008.

Helen Zia, former Executive editor of "Ms" magazine, journalist, advocate of same-sex marriage; San Francisco, 9 April 2008.

2010 Vancouver

Brian Orser, Olympic silver medallist (Canada figure skating); Pickering, Ontario, 17 December 2009.

Mark Tewksbury, Olympic gold medallist (USA swimming); Taber, British Columbia, 17 January 2010.

Marion Lay, Olympic bronze medallist (Canada swimming), past Chair of Vancouver 2010 Bid committee and member of the Organising Committee; Pemberton, British Columbia, 7 Feb 2010.

2012 London

Andy Stonehill-Brooks, founder of Support U, a charity created to build a network of LGBT support centres nationwide; Combe Martin, Devon, 21 May.

Vincent Jackson, charity fundraiser; Cardiff, 25 May.

Tara Mifflin, youth leader volunteer with Stonewall in their campaign to tackle homophobic bullying; Y Felinheli, Wales, 28 May.

Colin Renshaw, volunteer support worker in the LGBT community, and Manchester Pride and the 2002 Commonwealth Games; Bolton, Lancashire, 31 May.

Kevin Bartlett, amateur rugby coach, former recording artist (as Kevin Marques), 1990 Vancouver Gay Games gold

medallist (UK athletics); Ballycastle, Northern Ireland, 3 June.

Heather Davidson, student, Cerebral Palsy sufferer, volunteer with LGBT support groups in Manchester; Trafford, Lancashire, 24 June.

Trevor Burchick, MBE, founder of the Pride Games, Manchester, representative on the Gay and Lesbian International Sports Association; Stockport, Lancashire, 24 June.

Lorna McArdle, volunteer and past Chair of Reading Pride, member of local marching band; Reading, Berkshire, 10 July.

Jason Saw, head of MINDOUT, a charity founded to tackle mental illness in the LGBT community; Arundel, Sussex, 16 July.

Gideon Meade, founder of the Brighton Lesbian and Gay Sports Society; Brighton, Sussex, 16 July.

Colin Bentley, nursing assistant on an HIV ward, charity marathon runner; Brighton, Sussex, 17 July.

Gavin Owen, charity marathon runner, volunteer with Brighton Pride and London Pride; Eastbourne, Sussex, 17 July.

John Amaechi, OBE, former NBA basketball star, member of the London 2012 Diversity and Inclusion Group, campaigner for LGBT rights in sport; Greenwich, London, 21 July.

Tim Sullivan, Chairman of Kings Cross Steelers, the world's first gay rugby club; Haringey, London, 22 July.

Mark Healey, founder of 17-24-30, a campaign set up to mark the anniversary of the London Nail Bomb attacks of 1999, founder of the Vigil Against Hate Crime; Lewisham, London, 23 July.

Chris Basiurski, Chair of the Gay Football Supporter's Network, member of the Diversity Panel of the Football Association; Hammersmith, London, 26 July.

After the torch relay comes the lighting of the cauldron, not unlike the ceremonial lighting of the sacrificial fire on the Acropolis at the Greater Panathenaean Games. My research has yet to identify any LGBT cauldron-lighter.

But I actually have a connection to this year's Olympic cauldron. The cauldron was designed and built by Heatherwick Studios in London. One of the freelance model makers they employed recently was my old friend Mark.

STANDING ON CEREMONY

As with the torch relay it would be impossible to compile a complete list of LGBT participants in the ceremonies, but there is a surprisingly large number of known names to include.

The first mention must go to the athletes. Virtually all of the LGBT athletes mentioned in my Olympic Countdown have marched with their teams into the stadiums. A handful have had the honour of carrying their national flag either the opening or closing ceremony. These have been :

John Curry – GB (1976 Innsbruck)

Brian Orser – Canada (1988 Calgary)

Blyth Tait – New Zealand (2000 Sydney)

Chris Witty – USA (2006 Turin)

Gro Hammerseng – Norway (2008 Beijing).

As far as I can tell Greg Louganis is the only LGBT Olympian to have taken part in a ceremony as an athlete in his own right. In the opening ceremony of the 1996 Atlanta summer games he was part of the parade of living Olympic greats.

Several artistic and choreography directors have been openly gay, including one former Olympian (Pockar) :

Brian Pockar – artistic director, 1988 Calgary closing ceremony

Dimitris Papaioannou – artistic director, 2004 Athens, all ceremonies

Jean Grand-Maitre – choreography director, 2010 Vancouver, all ceremonies

Stephen Daldry – creative director, 2012 London, all ceremonies.

One mystery to solve is who suggested that the whole stadium should join in the actions to "YMCA" at the closing ceremony of the 2006 Turin games!

I've already mentioned the 2000 Sydney closing ceremony with its drag queens, Priscilla Queen of the Desert, Savage Garden and Kylie. Rather amazingly, all this high camp was the work of a straight director, David Atkins. He also directed the closing ceremony of the 2012 Vancouver winter games which featured Mounties high-kicking like a row of chorus girls. Not only that but television commentators remarked on the presence of giant beavers and lumberjack's choppers with glee!

With the Olympic heritage of Greece it came as no surprise to see Dimitris Papaioannou fill his opening ceremony with well-toned young men, all accurately portrayed as naked. Actually, the performers were wearing shorts with fake private parts! With the special place the god Eros has in relation to ancient Greek sport (as the god of same-sex relationships and sports training) it was fitting that he played a major part in the opening ceremony.

But that wasn't the first time that well-toned, half-naked men have appeared at an Olympic ceremony. Way back in the early days the gay Danish gymnast Niels Bukh brought his world renowned display team to the 1920, 1924, 1928 and 1936 Olympics to give exhibition displays. They didn't perform at the actual opening or closing ceremonies, but Bukh did march with the Swedish gymnastic team he had coached at the opening ceremony of the 1912 Stockholm Olympics.

When it comes to team uniforms, performer's costumes or special outfits, the list of LGBT fashion designers would be lengthy. A personal favourite was the dress worn by Carla Bruni at the opening ceremony in Turin in 2006. It was a sparkling, shimmering creation designed by Giorgio Armani and inspired by ice crystals. Armani himself has sporting connections as well, being president of the Olimpia Milano basketball team. He also designed the uniform of the England football team in 2003, and the uniforms of the Italian teams for both Turin 2006 and London 2012.

The ceremonies which can be said to have been the first of the big spectacles was Los Angeles in 1984. With typical 1980s-style gaudiness that only California would have produced gay costume designer Ray Aghayam came up with the gaudiest at both the opening and closing ceremonies.

In 1992 the gaudiness was used more effectively in the surreal carnival-style costumes designed by Peter Minshall (probably a gay designer, but I'll stand corrected). The closing ceremony included costumes by Harrison McEldowney.

Increasingly over the last half of the 20th century the inclusion of well-known singers and performers at the ceremonies has become expected. Of the LGBT performers only k d lang has appeared at two different Olympics. In 1988 in Calgary she sang "Turn Me Around" at the closing ceremony, and in 2010 in Vancouver she sang "Hallelujah" at the opening ceremony (of all the main performers only Gloria Estefan has been in more).

Staying with the Vancouver opening ceremony, the enfant terrible of Canadian Celtic folk-rock, Ashley MacIsaac, fiddled his way through a sequence with other folk-rock fiddlers, incongruously following a sedate ballet-dance sequence set to music by gay composer Samuel Barber. Thankfully Ashley was wearing black shorts under his kilt and didn't unintentionally "flash" live in front of a world-wide audience of millions – perhaps he'd learnt his lesson after flashing live on a late night tv show in 1998!

In recent years the Olympics have had specially written songs or anthems to celebrate the games and these have often been performed in the ceremonies. The most famous of these with LGBT connections is "Barcelona" by Freddie Mercury. As mentioned above, Freddie died just a few months before the opening ceremony in which he was to perform his song, robbing the world of what would have been an amazing performance.

For London 2012 several song-anthems have been written, including one by Sir Elton John written in collaboration with Pnau. The Scissor Sisters are also rumoured to be performing at some Olympic venues.

Whilst most pop singers are reserved for the closing ceremony party very few have been chosen to sing their national anthem. Only one can be identified – Lance Bass, with the group N'Sync, sang "The Star Spangled Banner" at the beginning of the closing ceremony of Salt Lake City in 2002.

The closing ceremony parties have had several LGBT performers, including Ricky Martin in Turin 2006, and the previously mentioned Darren Hayes with Savage Garden in Sydney 2000. Of course, it was Sydney which also treated us to Priscilla, Queen of the Desert accompanied by 50 drag queens. Iconic gay anthem "Over the Rainbow" was included in the 2002 Salt Lake City closing ceremony sung by Harry Connick jr.

As for the other performers, there must be as many as there are athletes, but I want to single out one in particular. Appropriately his name is Franklyn Singley. He is a dancer, choreographer and figure skater. He appeared in Salt Lake City in both ceremonies. Franklyn was assistant choreographer for the cultural section in the opening ceremony in which he performed in costume as a coyote. In the closing ceremony he was one of the dancers accompanying Gloria Estefan. Franklyn is notable in the figure skating world as being one half of one of the first African-American ice dance teams. He has also attended the Gay Games and won a gold medal in figure skating at the 2006 Chicago Gay Games, and a gold and silver at the 2010 Cologne Gay Games.