

# WSFF viewpoint - Women and the Olympics

**WSFF believe that the IOC should achieve gender parity in number of medals available, and the total number of athletes at the Olympic Games by 2016.**

Hosting the London 2012 Olympic Games provides a unique opportunity to address historical discrimination against women at the highest levels of sport. WSFF believe that by allowing women to participate in all Olympic sports and by closing the disparities between the medals available and the athlete numbers for men and women, London 2012 can be equally inspirational for boys and girls.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) sees itself as the leader of world sport and has made some efforts aimed at equality. While progress has been made in closing the gender gap, that gap stubbornly remains. We strongly believe London should serve as a significant step towards permanently eliminating Olympic and Paralympic gender inequality.

## A history of inequality

***"I do not approve of the participation of women in public competitions. In the Olympic Games, their primary role should be to crown the victors."* Baron Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympics.**

Women were not allowed to participate in the ancient games held in Olympia in Greece. And in 1890, when a young Baron de Coubertin visited the games held by the Olympian Society of Much Wenlock, in Shropshire, British Victorian attitudes were reflected by a similar absence of women. De Coubertin himself remained a lifelong and vociferous opponent of women's participation.

When London first hosted the Olympics in 1908, only 37 women competed, compared to 1,971 men. Women had to force their way into the modern Olympic Games. Frenchwoman Alice

Milliat spearheaded the efforts. It was only her organisation of a separate Women's Olympic Games in 1922 that saw the IOC relent and allow women to compete in athletics. By London 1948, there was a small improvement. 390 women competed alongside 3,714 men and Fanny Blankers-Koen emerged as a role model for girls around the world. Feminist activism during the 1960s and 1970s had little significant impact on the Olympics. Even by 1984 in Los Angeles, only 1,567 women competed alongside 5,511 men.

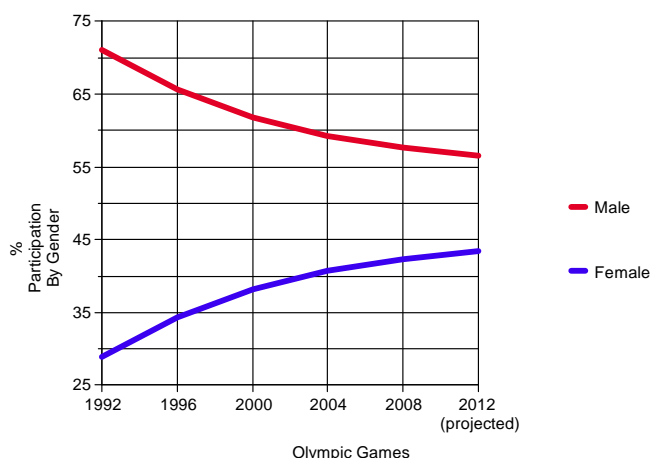
## A persistent gap

**At the Beijing Olympic Games 1,704 more men than women competed.**

Recent progress has been slow and the participation gap remains stubbornly wide. Gender inequality looks set to be a feature of the Olympics for many years to come (see below).



Olympic Games % Participation By Gender, 1992-2012



Source: OCOG Official Reports, BOCOG, projection

It is not just in the number of athletes attending the Games where women are disproportionately represented. They also face inequality in the number of events that they can compete in. For instance in Beijing 2008, there were 165 events for men, 127 for women and 10 mixed.

**Towards a level playing field**

**The IOC expects an equal number of men and women to compete in future Games.**

***"Our ultimate goal must be 50-50 participation", IOC President Jacques Rogge 7- March 2004 Marrakech***

It seems that London 2012 will still be somewhat short of 50-50.

WSFF believe that the IOC should achieve gender parity in both number of medals available, and the total number of athletes at the Games by 2016. To do this, significant progress should be made at the London 2012 Games.

We urge the IOC to include women's boxing for 2012. It currently remains the only summer Olympic sport which bars women entirely despite a successful track record of women's world championships and a history dating back to matches held in London in the 1720s.

In other sports, including cycling and canoe/kayak, there are many more medal events for men than for women. We believe that where the quality of world-wide competition permits, these gaps should be closed by the IOC Executive Board for 2012.

It won't be appropriate for all sports to have exactly equal participation between the genders, however the IOC should ensure that across the programme of sports in Olympic Games the number of medals and the number of men and women competing should be equal.

We believe that individual International Federations responsible for each sport should consider committing to equal number of events and equal numbers of men and women in each sport, and where appropriate publish a timescale to achieve this.

**More than just numbers**

**The Olympic family can do more than equalising the numbers of medals available for women.**

National Olympic Committees (NOCs) are responsible for the teams sent to the Olympics. In some cases they send many more men than women. Saudi Arabia, for example, has yet to send a woman athlete. We encourage the IOC and NOCs to ensure that the

women of each and every one of the world's nations are represented at London 2012.

We are grateful to the Olympics Minister, Tessa Jowell for ensuring that the message of equality is heard with regard to London 2012. Her position belies a wider absence of women from the senior levels of the project. For example only one of 18 LOCOG board members is a woman.

As the face of the Olympics for those attending, volunteers play a big role in the success of the event. We urge LOCOG to ensure that the needs of women in areas such as flexible working are properly met in order that there be no barriers to their participation as volunteers.

The idea that women crown the victorious men is outdated. However, Beijing's hostesses, were chosen on their looks, and were trained for the role by standing in five inch high-heels while balancing books on their heads with a sheet of paper between their knees. We ask LOCOG to ensure that medal ceremonies hosts and hostesses represent the diversity of the British population.

**Paralympic equality**

**The history of the Paralympic Games alludes to why more men than women take part.**

When Paralympic sport was introduced in England, in 1948, it was primarily geared towards men injured during World War II. 60 years on, among Beijing 2008 Paralympic athletes, men still outnumbered women nearly two to one. We urge the International Paralympic Committee and the governing bodies of Paralympic sports to set a timetable in which they commit to close this gap with an increase in women-specific programmes.

Table showing current gender discrepancies in number of available gold medals in Olympic events			
Athletics	24	23	50km walk
Boxing	11	-	No women's boxing to date
Canoeing (flatwater / kayak)	9	3	6 less events for women
Canoeing (slalom)	3	1	2 less events for women
Cycling (track)	7	3	Keirin, Madison, pursuit team and sprint team events missing for women
Rowing	8	6	coxless 4 & lightweight coxless 4
Sailing	6	4	Finn & 49er *
Shooting	9	6	50m pistol, Double Trap & 50m prone
Weightlifting	8	7	One less weight category
Wrestling	14	4	No Greco-Roman, 3 less Freestyle events

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