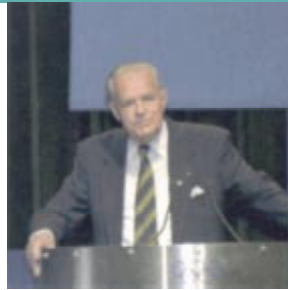


## WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE OLYMPIC GAMES

**W**omen in sport is blooming! More and more of our beloved life partners, young and old, have the opportunity to train, to get fit and to participate and compete in a rapidly increasing number of activities. This is generally accepted now, but this was not the case some 100 years ago. It is amazing however that many of my contacts during the last ten years, including officials, clearly show that many of them have no idea at all of what was once the role for women who wished to practice sport and had to fight for every little favour to reach today's privileged situation. For them it has really been "a long way to Tipperary" - as the British troops once

by Wolf Lyberg\*



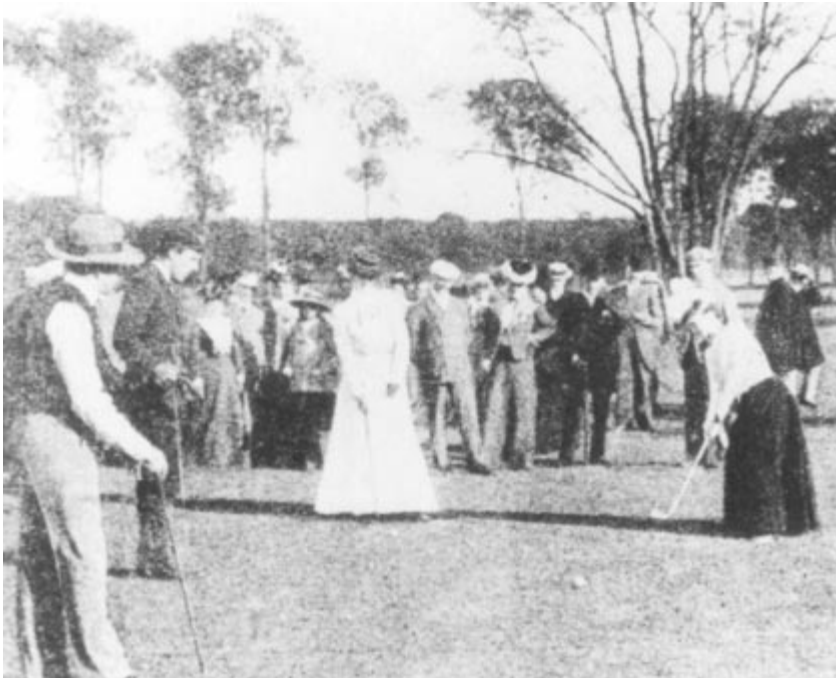
sang enjoying this as the ultimate dream they could imagine in their trenches.

The new generation seems to be unaware of this long battle fought and won. At the end of the 19th century, women's sport was only a part of the social life of the upper classes in

Europe and the United States. The only organized sports federation was the International Skating Union (ISU), founded in 1892, with figure skating and speed skating. Women also started to take part in yachting - a rather exclusive range of clubhouses made the sport extremely popular for both sexes.

It is of course not a coincidence that a conference is being organized in Paris, France. Not only because 100 years ago, women took part for the first time in the Olympic Games in Paris but also because France is famous for the words 'égalité' and 'liberté' something 'la femme mondaine' was demanding. It was at the Games of the II Olympiad in Paris where the first 19 women from five nations participated and where the first female Olympic champion was crowned. This matter is a 'hot potato' among researchers. Which sport had the honour to be the first: golf, tennis or yachting? The fact that women competed in three sports also confirms that the IOC was not greatly involved in these Games and the continuing fight about which sports were officially on the programme should be buried. Independent of this, it is easy to find out - looking at the programme of competitions, we have the order:

1. Helene de Pourtalés, Switzerland, May 25, Yachting
2. Charlotte Cooper, Great Britain, July 11, Tennis
3. Margaret Abbott, United States, October 3, Golf



*Women's golf at the Games in Paris in 1900.*



An interesting point surrounding this is that none of them had any idea that they had won an Olympic competition, like many of the men.

I just mentioned the scarce involvement of the IOC or of Pierre de Coubertin in the 1900 Games. Evidently Coubertin was so enthusiastic for the rites of the Ancient Games that he had to live them to the bitter end. The Greeks did not allow women, even as spectators. Coubertin fought for decades against women and in his message in 1928 to the Olympians, he declared: *"I am still against the participation of women in the Games. They have been included against my will"*.

He had managed to "dribble" away the subject of "sports for women" which was on the agenda of the Session in Brussels in 1905 suggesting it should be discussed *"at a more suitable occasion"*. Nevertheless the first vote on women's participation was held in 1910 at the Session in Luxembourg, when gymnastics and swimming were accepted for the programme of the Olympic Games in 1912. However, nothing is mentioned about a vote allowing figure skating at the Games in London in 1908.

The Session in Lausanne in 1913 should have discussed this subject again but in an article in the *'Olympic Review'* in July 1912, a new piece was written. Coubertin noted that the matter *"cannot be resolved negatively for the simple reason that Antiquity had resolved it thus. It cannot be resolved affirmatively either simply because women competitors have been accepted for swimming and tennis events in 1908 and 1912"*. He continued by saying: *"We do not fear to choose the negative side. We feel that the Olympic Games must be reserved for men As the saying*



*Sonja Henie in Saint-Moritz in 1928.*

*goes: a door must be open or closed. Can women be given access to all the Olympic events? No?. then why permit them some and bar them from others? And especially, on what basis does one establish the link between events permitted and events prohibited? There are not just tennis players and swimmers. There are also fencers, horsewomen, and in America there have also been rowers. Tomorrow, perhaps, there will be women runners or even soccer players. Would such sports be practiced by women constitute an edifying sight before crowds assembled for an*

*Olympiad? We do not think that such a claim can be made."*

It is rather amazing that he did not oppose mixed competitions because he considered such events as meaningless and that women did not stand a chance against men in swimming, fencing and riding. It would be even worse if women competed between themselves in other sports. Who would be interested in seeing this? Certainly no organizer as there would be extra costs, twice as high as at present. Nobody could afford it and furthermore women sports were impractical, uninteresting, unesthetic and improper!



*"The solemn and periodic exaltation of male athletics with internationalism as the base, loyalty as the means, art as its setting and female applause as reward". With these words in mind, I wonder what the Baron would think if he saw that 90, 145 paid to see the US football team winning the world title in 1999?*

So far it seemed that his fellow IOC members had accepted his ideas on women even if they welcomed swimmers and fencers in 1924 but refused track and field. Unexpectedly at the Session in Antwerp in 1920, his countryman Justinien de Clary declared: *"Remember Mr President, that one strong woman makes the whole of mankind stronger: I maintain that there are already women who can measure up to us men!"* At that time, it was perhaps a little bit too strong, but evidently there were women training even harder than men. Reading in the press cuttings of the 1912 archives I stumbled on an article of 7 July 1912 in the *'Louisville Herald'* which presented the 15 year-old Helen Preece as a participant in the modern pentathlon in Stockholm. It must have been quite a

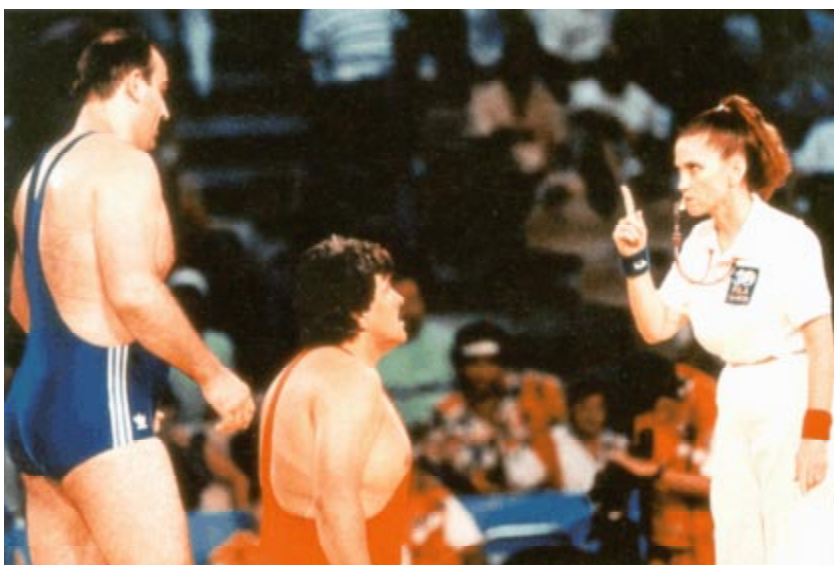
girl as the reporter wrote that "Helen is a good swimmer and fencer and she runs like a deer. She has won several open competitions in riding in the Madison Square Garden. She starts her training at 5am every morning and after 4-5 breaks she ends at around 8pm."

This was an unexpected confirmation of the long and animated exchange of letters between the 1912 organizers and the Baron following a request from the British Olympic Association President Coucy de Laffan that the girl be allowed to start. Here Coubertin was smart - he told the Swedes to make the final decision and they said no.

The so-called 'weaker sex' has, however, through the years shown its colours by obtaining results that nobody expected, especially as their performances beat those of athletes that dominated earlier Games. Even if it has taken a few years astonishing progress was achieved in results in events where, perhaps, power and strength are not so important. I am sure that some 75 years ago nobody even

dreamt of what has happened. Here are just a few examples:

1. Ingrid Kristiansen of Norway ran the marathon in 2'21"06 in 1985. Nobody remembered that the 'incredible' Emil Zatopek won the Olympic marathon in 1952 in 2'23"03.
2. Kristin Otto of the former East Germany won the Olympic title in 100m freestyle in 54"93 in 1988. She beat Johnny Weissmuller, 1928 Olympic champion by 4 seconds and even the 1960 Olympic champion in Rome, John Dewitt.
3. Gertrude Ederle, American wonder-child with German ancestors, only managed two bronze medals in Paris in 1924, but in 1929, aged 19, she crossed the English Channel from Cape Gris-Nez to Kingstown in 14'31", beating the best result of the men by more than 2 hours. She was the first swimmer to use the crawl across the whole distance.
4. Equestrian sports was nothing for women, wrote once Coubertin. It was not until 1952 that women were allowed to compete in the equestrian events at the Games, and the Danish girl Lisel Hart took silver in dressage (she was lame and had to be lifted up on her horse). In Seoul in 1988, three of the four German medallists in dressage were women. In 1976, 1988 and 1992, seven of the nine medallists in the military team event were women, even though this event is considered the most gruelling of all equestrian events. Through the years, some 17,000 women have taken part in Olympic Games. Contemporary fans around the world are certainly well acquainted with the names of the best women athletes of our age, but they may be unaware of the earlier competitors who contributed to the change of attitude towards women and sport and thus began the climb to today's standards.



*No bending the rules, gentlemen!*



*The Olympic champion, Fanny Durack.*

I have chosen to present three 'super-stars' among women of earlier years and when testing sports-minded friends among media and officials, my suspicions were confirmed. They only recognized Sonja Henie but the other two were completely unknown.

No sign of recognition was made when I mentioned the first name: Sarah 'Fanny' Durack, the first superstar in women's sport, Olympic champion in swimming in 1912, winner of the 100m freestyle, achieving one of the most superior victories when she beat the record holder Curwen by 6 metres and set a new world record (1'19".8). She had caused a women's revolution back in Sydney as the swimming officials (it was not the NOCs that sent the athletes at that time) refused to send her and the young Mina Wylie as they considered it a waste of money for just one event. Durack was still world-class and this gave rise to strong protests. Together with two chaperones - as was cus-

tomary - they travelled to Stockholm, where they became the talk of the town. World War I certainly stopped both of them from winning more medals but when they travelled to United States in 1919, the Australian Swimming Federation took revenge by not authorising their planned tour. They had to return home risking disqualification. Returning in 1920 before the Antwerp Games they had clearance but the United States organizers almost killed Sarah with the tough programme. Finally she refused to start before a full house and the hosts threatened her with lifetime disqualification if she did not swim. A surprised crowd suddenly saw her take off her bathrobe, jump in the water and swim 50 yards, telling the officials: "*There - I swam, didn't I?*"

But she never came to Antwerp. Two weeks before the trip to Europe, she suffered from appendicitis and was taken to hospital, her career was over. She then held all world records from 50 yards to a mile. She became a hotel owner and a highly popular trainer of young swimmers, but she also missed the Melbourne Games in 1956 as she died 6 months before at the age of 64.

My second choice is the French Suzanne Lenglen, a name I will never forget because my father, returning home from a business trip to Paris, eloquently told me about a young lady who had completely changed women's tennis, then consisting of underarm serves and long dresses over petticoats and corsets. "*What a woman*", he told the family. So-called tennis fathers in our day are well-known, but Suzanne's father Charles was probably the very first of them in the history of tennis. Her precision became incredible as her father placed coins and handkerchiefs on the ground and she could pinpoint the

object with her drives without missing. In Cannes she became a goldmine for her club and her father had a good head for business without risking her amateur status.

She completely changed her style of dress. The famous designer Jean Patou made her thin and short silk dresses, sleeveless blouses, short robes and disposed of the white stockings. She arrived in elegant fur coats and took a short zip of cognac between games. Her serve was so strong that the famous René Lacoste was astonished. She won gold in Antwerp and six titles at Wimbledon, but the Americans refused to accept her as number one. So she travelled to New York to meet Molla Mallory, the US champion. The hostile climate bewildered her and she lost the first set and then robbed her opponent from a certain victory by saying she was ill. A press-war broke out, it was a national catastrophe for France. It was not made better by the fact that she avoided meeting the new star from the United States, Helen Wills, at Wimbledon. This match of the century did not take place until February 1926 in Nice. Wills had then won the 1924 Olympic Games tournament - Lenglen did not take part in Paris! Now Suzanne played the match of her life and won 6-2 7-5 but the drama continued. The umpire changed the decision of the lines judge - even though the two opponents had thanked each other and were on their way off court. Good nerves were needed to continue under such circumstances - but the final set ended 8 to 6.

Suzanne died of anaemia at the young age of 39 - that was perhaps the reason why she always wore make-up when playing? - and was posthumously awarded the French Legion of Honour.

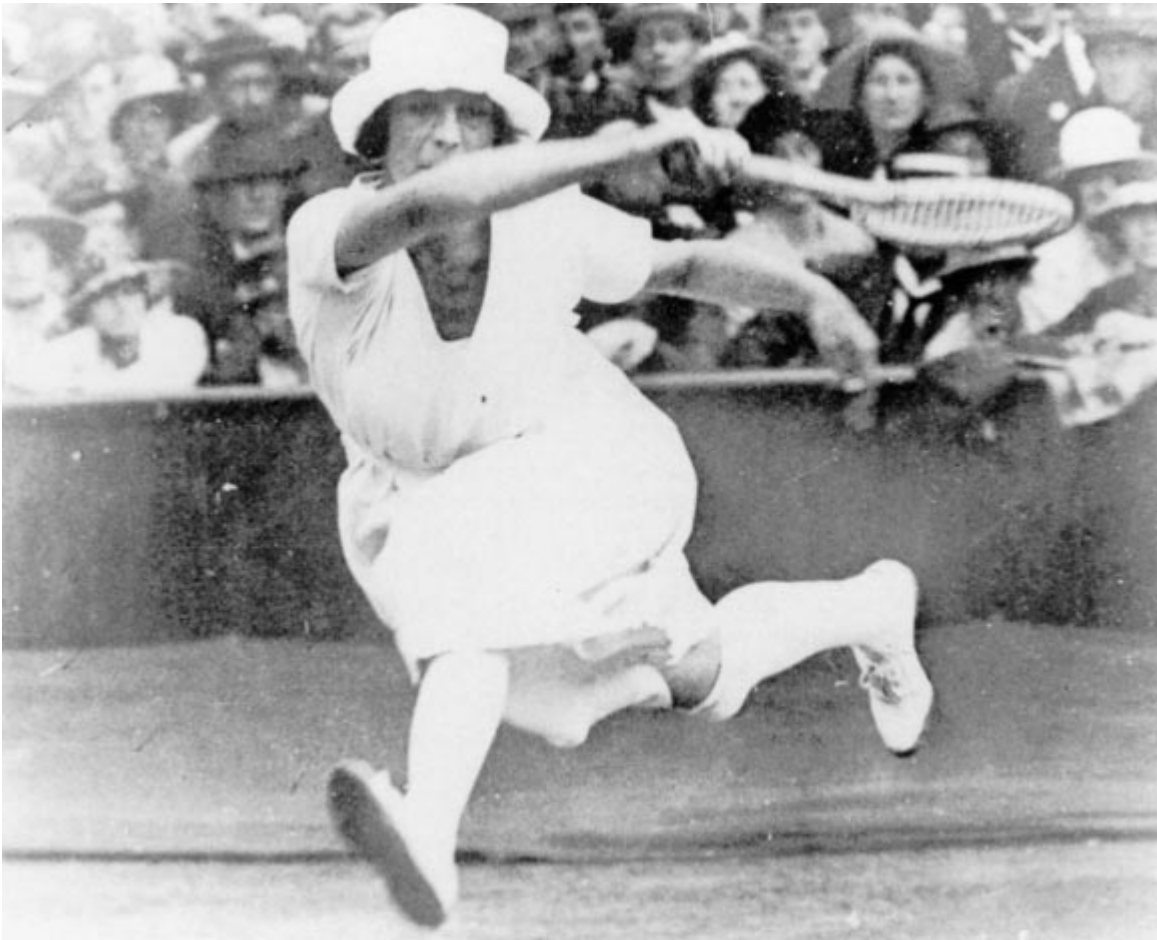
# Women & Sport

My third choice, Sonja Henie, was too well-known and she is still considered as the most fabulous figure skater ever. She had a rich father and mother through timber and fur, and her father was a good sportsman. The parents decided, when Sonja was only 5 years old, to make her a star. The famous Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova and her specialists taught her how to act graciously and even though she had won a Norwegian title at age 10, she proved to be too young for Chamonix in 1924. It was also by chance that she was able to start there as she was not entered in time, but the male skater Stirrud withdrew and the organizers gave the young girl his place. This

caused a storm of protests, not due to fear of defeat, but the other skaters opposed competing against a child. Sonja finished last, but four years later her training made her already unbeatable after the compulsory routine and her free programme was even better. She too went through a dress revolution, wearing short skirts and rich colours. She had added leaps, spins and pirouettes to her programme and skated at a rhythm never seen before. She won ten world titles, six European titles and three Olympic gold medals before she quit being an amateur in 1937 to become a movie-star with 20th Century Fox and the famous producer Darryl Zanuck. She became a

box office hit in Hollywood, along with Clark Gable and Shirley Temple, her films earned her 125,000 dollars each. She started her own travelling ice show and ended up as the wife of a rich Norwegian ship owner. It is said that Norway never forgave her for living most of her time abroad and her only error of judgement was when she 'hailed' Hitler in 1935 at an exhibition in Germany. She was said to be an extremely spoiled and selfish woman. I met her once and found her to be a warm and charming person without the manners of a prima donna.

Let me end this article with a few words about how women have succeeded as



*Suzanne Lenglen, Olympic champion in Antwerp in 1920.*



### Women's Participation Percentage of total participants

| Year | Games of the Olympiad | Olympic Winter Games |
|------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1896 |                       |                      |
| 1900 | 0,83                  |                      |
| 1904 | 1,71                  |                      |
| 1908 | 1,47                  |                      |
| 1912 | 2,31                  |                      |
| 1920 | 2,06                  |                      |
| 1924 | 4,43                  | 5,04                 |
| 1928 | 9,83                  | 5,62                 |
| 1932 | 9,56                  | 8,33                 |
| 1936 | 8,29                  | 11,98                |
| 1948 | 9,47                  | 11,51                |
| 1952 | 10,62                 | 15,71                |
| 1956 | 11,77                 | 16,09                |
| 1960 | 11,41                 | 21,65                |
| 1964 | 13,44                 | 18,36                |
| 1968 | 13,89                 | 18,22                |
| 1972 | 14,75                 | 20,48                |
| 1976 | 20,68                 | 20,57                |
| 1980 | 21,53                 | 21,74                |
| 1984 | 23,05                 | 21,49                |
| 1988 | 25,82                 | 22,07                |
| 1992 | 28,89                 | 27,09                |
| 1994 | -                     | 30,05                |
| 1996 | 34,04                 |                      |
| 1998 | -                     | 36,15                |

### NOCs with the most women participants 1900-1998

| Games of the Olympiad               |       |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. United States of America         | 1 183 |
| 2. Great Britain                    | 835   |
| 3. Germany/East Germany             | 744   |
| 4. Canada                           | 668   |
| 5. Russian Federation /Soviet Union | 634   |
| 6. Australia                        | 515   |
| 7. Japan                            | 499   |
| 8. France                           | 483   |
| 9. Netherlands                      | 460   |
| 10. Italy                           | 384   |
| Olympic Winter Games                |       |
| 1. United States of America         | 309   |
| 2. Canada                           | 221   |
| 3. Germany/East Germany             | 186   |
| 4. Austria                          | 140   |
| 5. Japan                            | 135   |
| 6. Sweden                           | 132   |
| 7. Great Britain                    | 131   |
| 8. France                           | 127   |
| 9. Italy                            | 121   |
| 10. Russian Federation/Soviet Union | 118   |

officials in sport within the Olympic Movement. Women as IOC members seemed to be an impossible feat from the beginning and reading the minutes of both the Sessions and the Executive Board meetings, the subject was never mentioned until the Mexico Session in 1968 when the now IOC honorary member, Jean de Beaumont, presented many proposals, one of them being to co-opt women as members. What a flop it was! Avery Brundage - with whom he competed for the Presidency

- informed him during the Session that none of his proposals could be dealt with as he had not sent them to the IOC 60 days before the Session. They were never discussed again. Several more attempts were made, one by Arpad Csanadi in 1972 and one by Maurice Herzog in 1975, and the latter's proposal was so successful that the Executive Board submitted it to the Session in Montreal in 1976 where it was carefully 'torpedoed' with a large majority.

In his first speech as IOC President, Samaranch promised to have women as members and 1981 saw the first women as IOC members. Since then and up to the end of 1999, a total of 117 members have been co-opted, 16 of them (13,7%) being women and of the present 113 members, 14 are women (12.39%) so the aim of 10% by the end of 2000 has been more than achieved.

\* Olympic historian.



## Games of the Olympiad 1900 - 1996

Total participation: 79 702 Women participation: 13 988 Percentage 17.55

| Sport                          | From year          | NOCs participants | Number of women who took part at |            |            |            |            |            |            | Total | Percentage |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------|------------|
|                                |                    |                   | 1 edition                        | 2 editions | 3 editions | 4 editions | 5 editions | 6 editions | 7 editions |       |            |
| Athletics                      | 1928               | 174               | 2 696                            | 681        | 169        | 32         | 4          | 1          | -          | 3 583 | 23.09      |
| Rowing                         | 1976               | 40                | 707                              | 155        | 25         | 4          | -          | -          | -          | 891   | 15.18      |
| Badminton                      | 1992               | 34                | 106                              | 36         | -          | -          | -          | -          | -          | 142   | 47.18      |
| Basketball                     | 1976               | 18                | 375                              | 75         | 4          | 2          | -          | -          | -          | 456   | 19.03      |
| Canoeing                       | 1936               | 43                | 305                              | 90         | 21         | 4          | 1          | -          | -          | 421   | 18.47      |
| Cycling                        | 1984               | 46                | 179                              | 42         | 7          | 2          | -          | -          | -          | 230   | 5.43       |
| Equestrian                     | 1952               | 33                | 177                              | 38         | 19         | 5          | 3          | 1          |            | 243   | 13.71      |
| Fencing                        | 1924               | 52                | 356                              | 117        | 46         | 29         | 4          | 1          | 1          | 554   | 16.26      |
| Football                       | 1996               | 8                 | 122                              | -          | -          | -          | -          | -          | -          | 122   | 2.92       |
| Gymnastics                     | 1928               | 54                | 1 098                            | 171        | 30         | 2          | -          | -          | -          | 1 301 | 36.64      |
| Handball                       | 1976               | 20                | 397                              | 80         | 10         | -          | -          | -          | -          | 487   | 30.63      |
| Hockey                         | 1980               | 16                | 363                              | 82         | 12         | 1          | -          | -          | -          | 457   | 17.10      |
| Judo                           | 1992               | 64                | 213                              | 48         | -          | -          | -          | -          | -          | 261   | 17.84      |
| Swimming                       | 1912               | 107               | 2 302                            | 466        | 82         | 6          | -          | -          | -          | 2 856 | 41.08      |
| Softball                       | 1996               | 6                 | 120                              | -          | -          | -          | -          | -          | -          | 120   | 100        |
| Tennis                         | 1900-24<br>1988-96 | 53                | 177                              | 50         | 9          | -          | -          | -          | -          | 236   | 33.01      |
| Table Tennis                   | 1988               | 52                | 110                              | 42         | 4          | -          | -          | -          | -          | 156   | 46.99      |
| Shooting                       | 1968               | 79                | 235                              | 64         | 23         | 3          | 1          | -          | -          | 326   | 6.36       |
| Archery                        | 1972               | 54                | 247                              | 37         | 11         | 1          | -          | -          | -          | 296   | 40.77      |
| Yachting                       | 1900<br>open       | 52                | 152                              | 42         | 3          | -          | -          | -          | -          | 197   | 5.94       |
| Volleyball                     | 1964               | 22                | 500                              | 129        | 24         | 2          | -          | -          | -          | 655   | 42.76      |
| Overall number                 |                    |                   | 10936                            | 2445       | 497        | 93         | 13         | 3          | 1          | 13988 | 17.55      |
| Percentage (on overall figure) |                    |                   | 78.18                            | 16.48      | 3.93       | 0.75       | 0.19       |            |            |       |            |

**Note: Sports with only men: Baseball - Modern pentathlon - Water Polo - Weightlifting - Boxing - Wrestling.**  
**A women modern pentathlon event will be on the programme of the Games of the XXVII Olympiad in Sydney.**  
**The Swedish Kerstin Palm took part in 7 Games of the Olympiad consecutively from 1964 through 1988 (fencing).**

## Winter Games 1908 - 1998

Total participation: 13 310  
 Women participation: 2 908  
 Percentage: 21.85

| Sport/<br>Event                      | From year | NOCs par-<br>ticipants | Number of women who took part at |            |            |            |            |            | Total | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|------------------------|----------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------|------------|
|                                      |           |                        | 1 edition                        | 2 editions | 3 editions | 4 editions | 5 editions | 6 editions |       |            |
| Biathlon                             | 1988      | 30                     | 93                               | 65         | 12         | -          | -          | -          | 170   | 22.79      |
| Curling                              | 1998      | 8                      | 40                               | -          | -          | -          | -          | -          | 40    | 50         |
| Ice<br>Hockey                        | 1998      | 6                      | 118                              | -          | -          | -          | -          | -          | 118   | 4.12       |
| Luge                                 | 1964      | 15                     | 112                              | 32         | 15         | 5          | 1          | -          | 165   | 29.47      |
| Figure<br>skating                    | 1908      | 46                     | 500                              | 113        | 29         | 2          | -          | -          | 644   | 53.22      |
| Short<br>Track<br>Skating            | 1960      | 30                     | 226                              | 99         | 34         | 8          | 3          | -          | 370   | 30.43      |
| Speed<br>Skating                     | 1992      | 19                     | 58                               | 26         | 6          | -          | -          | -          | 90    | 46.88      |
| Alpine<br>Skiing                     | 1936      | 55                     | 491                              | 148        | 65         | 7          | -          | -          | 711   | 34.63      |
| Freestyle<br>Skiing                  | 1992      | 21                     | 50                               | 20         | 11         | -          | -          | -          | 81    | 39.51      |
| Nordic<br>Skiing                     | 1952      | 42                     | 300                              | 97         | 50         | 13         | 2          | 1          | 463   | 16.68      |
| Snowboard                            | 1998      | 17                     | 56                               | -          | -          | -          | -          | -          | 56    | 44.8       |
| Overall<br>number                    |           |                        | 2 044                            | 600        | 222        | 35         | 6          | 1          | 2 908 | 21.85      |
| Percentage<br>(on overall<br>figure) |           |                        | 70.29                            | 20.63      | 7.63       | 1.2        | 0.25       |            |       |            |

**Note:** Sport with only men: Bobsleigh: 1 255.  
 Marja-Liisa Hämäläinen-Kirvisniemi took part in 6 Olympic Winter Games from 1976 to 1994. (Nordic skiing).