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- [Field Hockey](#)
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- [Handball](#)
- [Judo](#)
- [Modern Pentathlon](#)
- [Rhythmic Gymnastics](#)
- [Rowing](#)
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- [Swimming](#)
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## Olympic Games

### Feature-Demonstration Sports

# Demonstrations in the Olympic ring

Unofficial Olympic sports get tested through demonstration events

Last Updated: Thursday, May 22, 2008 | 12:37 PM ET [Comments2Recommend14](#)

Ashley Terry [CBC Sports](#)



*Crowds in the Olympic Stadium at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. (Hulton Archive/Getty Images)*

## Story Content

- [Organizing committees](#)
- [A matter of cost](#)

It's 1936 in Berlin. The Games have come to Germany, the home of an angry society that is about to turn the world on its head.

An American baseball team arrives to play for baseball supremacy. Officially the game is only a demonstration sport, but a record crowd of 125,000 people descends upon Berlin's Olympic Stadium after dark, expecting to see a tough competition. Only the Americans dressed in their heavy cotton uniforms show up.

With no one to play against, the Americans split up into two separate teams and played against each other. In the end, the side dubbed the World Amateurs beat their former teammates, called the USA Olympics, by a score of 6-5. More importantly, baseball was being played in the Olympic Games.

This was the way sports went from being on the sidelines to becoming a real Olympic sport, with medals and all of the glory of becoming an official part of the Games. Sports like badminton, taekwondo, and women's judo are part of the Olympic family thanks to their past demonstration status.

In the past, demonstrations have also been held to showcase sports indigenous to the country hosting the Games. Sports like pelote basque, played in France (and a little town in Quebec called Trois-Pistoles), captured the eyes of the world for a few fleeting days during the Paris Games in 1900.

But the world will not see demonstration sports in Beijing. As of 1992, demonstration sports were removed from the Olympics.

#### **Undue burden on organizing committees**

David Wallechinsky, author of the *Complete Book of the Summer Olympics*, says that the inclusion of demonstration sports in the Games was an undue burden on organizing committees. According to him, the IOC “just got into a panic that the Olympics were too big.”

The number of official Olympic events has been capped at 28, even though events are subdivided, bringing the actual total to well over that. IOC President Jacques Rogge, in a nod to those who want the sport of wushu (known in the west as kung fu) to be included in the Olympic Games, has agreed to hold an international non-medal wushu competition in Beijing. He has been careful, however, not to call it a demonstration sport for the 2008 Olympics.



*Athletes compete during a women's free fight match of wushu martial arts. (China Photos/Getty Images)* Although it is not technically a demonstration sport, the competition will give wushu greater visibility and a larger audience, as has been the case with demonstration sports in the past, such as baseball.

Baseball appeared seven times in the Olympics as a demonstration sport, before finally getting official status. When it first appeared in the Games in 1912, it was a one-game event, and the participants were athletes who were already at the Games for other sports. This one-game format persisted until 1984, when the more typical tournament-style was adopted.

The road to official status was not an easy one. It was supposed to become an Olympic sport in 1940,

before the cancellation of the Games, but its popularity waned and it did not return for 12 years.

When it made a comeback in 1952, only 4,000 fans came to watch. Four years later in Melbourne, the numbers did not improve. It wasn't until the Games came to Los Angeles that the numbers grew significantly. More than 380,000 fans came to watch their national sport on an international stage.

Wallechinsky says, "demonstration sports add flavour. You get to see something different. When the Olympics were in Barcelona, I was living in Europe at the time, so I took my kids to see roller hockey (a demonstration sport in those Games). They liked it better than some of the medal sports they saw."

But when the Games were becoming too big and something had to go, according to him, the demonstration sports were "an easy hit".

#### **A matter of cost**

According to Olympic historian Bill Mallon, it is not only a matter of size, but a matter of cost. Using demonstration events to "test out" sports that already have international championships needlessly increases the cost of the Games.

Demonstration events that showcase sports indigenous to the host country, however, are more worthwhile in his view. These types of events "exposed these somewhat minor sports that really have little chance of ever getting on the Olympic program, to the world. I think it was a negative to exclude all demonstration sports. Some minor demonstrations could still be included and not expand costs a great deal."

In 2012, the Games will become even leaner, with only 26 events. Baseball was one of the first sports to be cut from the medal event list. With demonstration sports out as well, this will leave baseball on the Olympic sidelines in London.

But baseball's Olympic future may not be so bleak. It is a main contender for one of the two openings in the event schedule of the 2016 Olympic Games.

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**[polofan](#) wrote:**Posted 2008/08/13

at 11:31 AM ETRight, because baseball has no judging in it.

Of the 28 sports, I count 19 where judges/referees/officials play an active role in determining the winner ( or can influence the outcome ).

Baseball is a boring sport, played by whiny overpaid kids and fat old men with unreal tempers, and infected by drug abuse and tobacco chew. It is America's favourite pastime, and they are fat and lazy.

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**[Taunto](#) wrote:**Posted 2008/08/13

at 9:17 AM ETI vote to get rid of gymnastics, synchronized swimming, synchronized diving, and any other event that relies on judges to score the athletes. These events are way too subjective, and the judges (as we know from history) can far too easily hold grudges, or be bought out.

Getting rid of these events should open up space for more real sports... get baseball back in there!

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