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Opening Extract from...

Great Olympic Moments

Written by Sir Steve Redgrave

Published by Headline

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Great Olympic Moments

Steve Redgrave

headline

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To Mom and Dad for being such great parents throughout my life

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Introduction

As a ten-year old boy, I was inspired to begin my own sporting journey after watching the legendary swimmer Mark Spitz win a record-breaking haul of gold medals at the Munich Olympics in 1972. Little did I know that, twenty-eight years later, I would be entering the record books myself after winning my fifth gold medal at the Sydney Olympics in 2000. The Olympic games have been absolutely central to my career and my life, which is why I have chosen to share with you my selection of *Great Olympic Moments* in this book.

For me, each Olympics I have competed in has conjured up a fascinating mixture of sensations, from the gut-wrenching physical pain of intense competition to the elation of winning and the knowledge that I have given absolutely everything in pursuit of a dream. The Olympic dream was sparked into motion by visionary French aristocrat Pierre Coubertin, who believed that the well-being of entire nations could be enhanced by striving to achieve sporting excellence. Indeed, the realisation of that dream with the staging of the first modern Olympics in Athens in 1896 could also be regarded as a great moment in itself.

Some of the moments I have chosen to include, such as the Munich hostage crisis of 1972, are tragic rather than celebratory. I have also included episodes which deal with the competitive misfortune of individual athletes as well as the stories of those who have sought to gain an unfair advantage by cheating. Such is sport and life. The story of the Olympics is one of both elation and dejection, success and ignominy, and it would be remiss not to include moments that reflect this, however painful some of those memories are.

In Brazil in 2016, golf will re-enter the Olympic family of events, and rugby (sevens format) is also included for the very first time. I have chosen to recount my golfing experience with Tiger Woods in Hyde Park shortly after the Sydney Olympics in 2000, to demonstrate what the Olympics means to all, even one of the greatest sportsmen on the planet. I hope that the newly-included sports will deliver their core integrity to the Olympics in the same way that many other sports and individual athletes have done before them. Whilst this is a book focussed mainly on the summer Olympics, I have also included a selection of moments from the winter games. The inclusion of Ingemar Stenmark's double gold at Lake Placid in 1980 is an homage to the sport of skiing which is a personal passion of mine.

I fully acknowledge that you will have your own personal recollection of the Olympics. My selection is by no means definitive and won't necessarily match your own. What I hope it will do is bring vividly to life the true wonder of the Olympics, and reveal some of the more unlikely and less-well known events in Olympic history. If nothing else, this book should help you ignite some healthy debate among your friends and family.

To my mind, the Olympics are a truly unique event, where individuals and nations come together, united in a kindred spirit of healthy, glorious competition. To those that have competed in the past, I raise my thanks. They have inspired me and countless others throughout the years and will continue to do so. I am extremely proud that the Olympics are returning to Great Britain in 2012, and to those athletes yet to compete, I look forward to witnessing those, who, by their actions, will make the Olympic flame glow even brighter.





Ben Ainslie

Sydney 2000
Laser Fleet Sailing

I wouldn't call anyone in sport – or life, for that matter – a kindred spirit, but Britain's greatest sailor, Ben Ainslie, comes closer than most. I, too, messed around in boats for years, I won gold medals at successive Olympic Games and for a huge length of time no one took much notice.

At Los Angeles in 1984, my debut Olympics, you couldn't exactly say that the BBC built up to the coxed fours with a fanfare. 'Right,' said Des Lynam, the BBC anchorman, from behind his desk, 'and now we go over to Lake Casitas where we have a chance of a medal.' Zoom into start line. There we were.

I could never really understand why the *fifth* gold medal warranted documentaries and a knighthood and a BBC Sports Personality of the Year award, while the fourth, the third, the second and the first did not. Perhaps that is just me being pedantic, but they were the same achievement each time.

Perhaps this is when it will kick on for Ainslie. London 2012 is set to be his fifth Olympics. He began his medal chase in Atlanta with silver in the Laser class, followed by golds at the next three Olympics, which included an incredible weight gain of 15kg (33lb) to take part in the bigger, heavier Finn class.

I, too, messed around in boats for years, I won gold medals at successive Olympic Games and for a huge length of time no one took much notice.

What a joy that must be – licence to eat cake. Sadly, my weight gains have all been illicit.

Yet Ben has emerged from all these great performances without the recognition I think he deserves. Unlike his fellow sailors, Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Drake, Dame Ellen MacArthur, he has yet to feel the touch of the Queen's sword on his shoulder and I'm mystified as to why that should be.

Put it this way, Kelly Holmes won two golds in one Olympics and was rewarded with the status of a Dame. Nothing should be taken away from her tremendous performance and recognition, but Ben has, to date, won a silver and three golds in four successive Olympics and has so far worked his way up to a CBE. Why? If comparing, I would suggest his performance is the superior of the two. Is his achievement really less valuable?

I put it down to politics. I can't help being cynical and concluding that the honours system is entirely about the desire of politicians to cosy up to people in the heavy media limelight. Men in boats aren't as immediately attractive and triumphant as a double gold-medal-winning track athlete on the front pages of every newspaper – especially when, as in Ben's case, so much of his sport takes place far out to sea, and you seem to be watching a watery dot most of the time. It doesn't help that

I can't help being cynical and concluding that the honours system is entirely about the desire of politicians to cosy up to people in the heavy media limelight. Men in boats aren't as immediately attractive and triumphant as a double gold-medal-winning track athlete on the front pages of every newspaper.

So much of his sport takes place far out to sea, and you seem to be watching a watery dot most of the time. It doesn't help that the nature of the action is often unclear, involving convoluted calculations of time, tide and wind, and sometimes the boats just seem to sit on the spot.

the nature of the action is often unclear, involving convoluted calculations of time, tide and wind, and sometimes the boats just seem to sit on the spot.

This was very true in Sydney in 2000 when Ben's gold medal was dependent upon beating the Brazilian, Robert Scheidt, in the final race of the series. Ben simply needed to stay ahead of his rival to win gold, so instead of racing in the conventional sense, he took an immediate lead and then seemed to hang about. In fact, connoisseurs acknowledged that he was behaving with great tactical astuteness, preventing his opponent getting past him. To the rest of us, it just looked like floating.

Ben has gone on to have a glittering career – more Olympic gold medals, three times World Sailor of the Year, appointed captain of the GB America's Cup team before they pulled out of the 2013 event – and yet the knighthood is still pending.





Bob Beamon

Mexico 1968

Long jump final

This is an extraordinary picture. It looks like the athlete is being catapulted, literally, to Olympic stardom. He's so high off the ground and looks so shocked, it's almost as though he can hardly believe it himself.

This is a rare moment, the thin air of Mexico City creating a picture, a feat, a legend, that Beamon himself would never be able to recreate – one of those elusive split seconds when it all comes together, the almost-impossible dream. In this case, his run-up (he was a sprinter by trade) was fantastically fast, the take-off perfect to a millimetre, the height prodigious and the flight just seemed to go on forever. When he eventually came back to earth, it was as the record-breaking Olympic champion.

If only one of the lady judges hadn't missed it. Where can she have been looking? At least her colleague, in the smart hat, is leaning forward, apparently stunned, probably thinking, 'Can I believe what I'm seeing?'

What she was seeing was the flight of a human cannonball. Put it this way. The world record, jointly held by Ralph Boston of the USA and Igor Ter-Ovanesyan of the Soviet Union, was 27ft 4¾in. Bob Beamon sailed through that. He approached the 28ft barrier and sailed through that, too. He kept on sailing. He approached the 29ft barrier and he sailed through that. He finally came to rest, with a thud, at a distance of 29ft 2½in. He landed with such force that he bounced out of the pit altogether.

The stunned snatches of conversation that subsequently took place have been handed down through posterity.

'That's over 28 feet!' gasped record-holder Boston to reigning Olympic champion, Lynn Davies of Wales.

'With his first jump? No, it can't be.'

***'That's over
28 feet!'***

Ralph Boston

***'With his first
jump? No, it
can't be.'***

Lynn Davies

Meanwhile, the officials had gone to search out an old-fashioned steel tape measure because the leap had surpassed their electronic marker's capabilities. Eventually, after a long pause, '8.90m' flashed up on the scoreboard. Beamon, unfamiliar with the metric system, had no idea what it meant. Boston had to explain it to him. 'Bob, you jumped 29 feet.'

So overwhelmed was Beamon that his legs gave way and he sank to the floor in what doctors later described as a 'cataleptic seizure' brought on by emotional shock. His Soviet rival was pretty shocked, too.

'Compared to this jump, we are as children,' said Ter-Ovanesyan.

Davies put it even more starkly. 'I can't go on,' he said. He barely did. He finished ninth.

Some legendary sporting moments are a matter of culmination – Michael Johnson in Atlanta, for example, or Ingemar Stenmark at Lake Placid. Others are more freakish. Beamon's jump was king of the freaks, but not because Bob Beamon was not a tremendous athlete. He was. The 6ft 3in 22-year-old from South Jamaica, New York, had won 22 of his last 23 meetings. But, somewhat hit-or-miss down the runway, he was prone to foul jumping. He had also been without a coach for the four months leading up to the Olympics because he was suspended for refusing to compete against Brigham Young University as a protest against racial Mormon policies.

So overwhelmed was Beamon that his legs gave way and he sank to the floor in what doctors later described as a 'cataleptic seizure' brought on by emotional shock.

After this monumental moment in his life, Beamon never jumped farther than 26ft 11½in.

So he was not the unarguable favourite for the event. It is not even certain he would have survived the qualifying rounds, had not his generous fellow-countryman, Boston, given him a hint about how to handle his errant jumping just before his last-chance leap to qualify. I wonder if Boston ever regretted it.

Having qualified, just, Beamon then awaited his first jump in the competition final. He wasn't even confident himself. In fact, he was fretting about the fact that he'd had sex the night before. Beamon found himself worrying about the fact that he might have expended vital energy the night before his big event. The evidence would suggest not.

At the time, Beamon's jump was hailed as the greatest athletic achievement of all time, and it has to be right up there. Look at the figures. Since Jesse Owens' record-breaking jump of 26ft 8¼in in 1935, the world record had progressed 8½in in 33 years. In seconds, Beamon had added another 21¾in. Nearly two feet! It is almost incredible.

So I don't apologise for the word 'freak' to describe Beamon's colossal jump in Mexico. And this is my final evidence. After this monumental moment in his life, Beamon never jumped farther than 26ft 11½in.





This page: 1) Butlin's baby contest (aged six months, didn't win!). 2) Some early monkey business with my sister Jane. 3) Me as a schoolkid about 5 years old. 4) On sister Christine's wedding day, 24th March 1973. 5) Slogging it out on the river. 6) School crew. *Left to right:* Nicky Baatz, Clive Pope, Robert Hayley, me, Peter McConnell. 7) Four in a boat. *Left to right:* Julian Scrivener, Adam Clift, Eric Sims and me.

This page: 8) The Diamond Challenge Sculls, Henley Royal Regatta, 1983. 9) Same Olympian, different pet (Tasha). 10) World Championships, Nottingham, 1986. 11) With family and MBE, 1987. 12) *Left to right:* Tim Foster, me, Matt Pinsent, James Cracknell, The Steward's Challenge Cup, Henley Royal Regatta, 1997. 13) With Ann and the children, Sydney 2000. 14) Receiving my Knighthood, 2001. 15) At the royal unveiling of my statue, Higginson Park, Marlow.



Greg Louganis

Seoul 1988

Springboard diving

There are times when it all just goes horribly wrong. I am no stranger to that concept and neither was the great American diver, Greg Louganis, who arrived at my second Olympics in Seoul as an overwhelming favourite for two titles.

Four years previously in Los Angeles, at 24, he had already been regarded as one of the greatest divers there had ever been. He had not lost on platform or springboard for three years. The child of 15-year-old parents, of Samoan extraction, he had survived a traumatic childhood during which he had almost become a teenage alcoholic. Sport, as it so often does, had provided him with discipline, and a route out of trouble.

By Seoul, he had won 19 consecutive international springboard competitions between 1982 and 1987, although one Chinese rival, Tan Liangde, who, for six years, had been studying videotapes of Louganis in action, managed to pull off two sensational victories against the master in the lead-up to Seoul. Nevertheless, Louganis, the defending Olympic champion, was still considered supreme.

True to form, he was leading the preliminary round of the springboard competition when he stepped on to the board for this ninth dive, a reverse two-and-a-half somersault with pike. He leapt in the air, as he had done a thousand times, but on this occasion he failed to push out far enough. As he came down, his head crashed into the end of the board and he fell, with unaccustomed inelegance, into the water. Blood was seeping from the gash as he climbed out of the pool.

A mere 35 minutes later, he was back on the board with four temporary stitches in his head.



The next day he won his gold medal and went on, a week later, to earn a second gold in the platform event.

A mere 35 minutes later, he was back on the board with four temporary stitches in his head, and earned the highest score of any diver in the preliminaries with another reverse somersault. Only then was he taken to hospital for treatment and a waterproof patch. The next day he won his gold medal and went on, a week later, to earn a second gold in the platform event. Horrible accident though it was, for an athlete at the pinnacle of his sport, the show always goes on.

I knew Louganis slightly at these Olympics – unusually for me, because I was mostly suspended in a rowing-only bubble. He had taken a shine to one of the guys in the coxed four and used to turn up occasionally to have a chat with him.

It was only later, however, that Louganis confirmed he was gay and, indeed, HIV positive. It gave greater perspective on his reaction to winning his second gold medal, when he sobbed in the arms of his coach. Most people thought at the time it was just the natural reaction to his success. In fact, he had been contending with the huge stress of masking a potentially fatal condition. It may even have been as a result of this stress that he had suffered his accident in the first place.

At least that's something you can say for rowing. It's not life-threatening, as a rule. You pull muscles, you get miserable, you get cold, you ache, you eat too much, but there are no physically dangerous obstructions in your way. All my accidents, in a long and fairly torrid history, stemmed from off-the-field activities. As a teenager, I used to cut people's lawns for pocket money and succeeded in slicing a lump off my big toe through my trainers. Fellow Olympic rower, Ed Coode, once broke a bone in my foot while playing football.

Then there was the ill-conceived rugby match against a touring team, organised by another one of the GB rowers, Ben Hunt-Davis, when our coach, Jurgen, who would have

forbidden such a thing, had gone home for Christmas. We rather fancied our chances, being egotistical sportsmen, and it was only during the match we discovered that two of their blokes played for Harlequins.

We should have sensed that the omens were bad when we discovered that all 15 players on our side had only ever been second-row forwards. I ended up at centre and within 10 minutes of the game I'd gone in for a tackle and not come out the other side. Instead, I was rolling on the floor in agony. I thought I'd broken my shoulder. In fact, I had ruptured the ligaments round the acromioclavicular joint at the top of the shoulder and had to admit as much, sheepishly, to Jurgen when he came back. He was not impressed; neither was he impressed the time I fell off a physio ball only months prior to Sydney and chipped a bone in my elbow.

The rider to the story is that I had reconstructive surgery to my shoulder when my rowing career was over. It seemed to be a success, but my consultant expressly forbade me to go skiing soon after the operation. I went skiing. I fell and, in considerable agony, thought I'd ruptured it again. Nine days later I went back, in both pain and trepidation, to see him and it turned out I'd only broken my collarbone. A lucky escape.

The conclusion you have to draw is that athletes, by nature, seem destined to push themselves into areas of risk. It probably isn't a coincidence that 10 years after Sydney both James Cracknell and I decided to cycle across America in different and unrelated events, and we both suffered unpleasant head injuries that truncated our experience.

As for Louganis, he went on to have an eclectic career which has included roles as an actor, dancer, dog trainer, speaker and Aids activist. But he will no doubt be best remembered for his wince-inducing moment on the springboard in Seoul.



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