



**August 9, 2004**

## **SECURITY CONCERNS CLOUD 2004 OLYMPIC GAMES PREPARATIONS**

*Set against the dramatic backdrop of ancient temples and gnarled olive trees in Greece -- the birthplace of the first Olympics in 776 B.C., this year's Games have been plagued by ballooning construction costs and fears of a terrorist attack.*

The original Olympics were not just about sports; it was a men-only religious festival in honor of Zeus, king of the gods held every fourth summer, in Olympia, Greece. On the third day of the five-day event, when the moon was full, the priest marched 100 white oxen to the Great Altar of Zeus, where each one was sacrificed and then roasted in a sacred flame.

Unlike today's Olympics where athletes show off top-of-the-line apparel from Nike to Speedo, the original Olympians competed naked. And while there are now 37 sports ranging from Judo to table tennis, the early Olympic Games consisted of only a sprint competition. The short race was soon expanded to include long runs, pentathlon, boxing, chariot racing, pankration (extreme wrestling where there were virtually no rules), and armor foot racing.

Today, new events can be added if they meet the definition set by the International Olympic Committee: an Olympic sport must be "widely practiced by men in at least 75 countries and on four continents, and by women in at least 40 countries and on three continents."

### **Athens 2004**

Organizing the Olympic Games is an enormous challenge and makes some people wonder why any city would want to do it in the first place. Dick Yarbrough, communications director for the group that hosted the 1996 Games in Atlanta, argues that the event is a big boon to a city's business, tourism and infrastructure, with effects that last for years. However, he believes it works better in some cities than others.

Greece's population of just 11 million makes it the smallest country to host the Olympics since Finland in 1952. So far the games have cost an estimated total of \$8.4 billion -- 52 percent more than what was initially planned. The city built a new light rail line and more than 100 miles of new roads and highways.

However organizers are having trouble attracting spectators.

Ticket sales are down in comparison to other Games, with less than half sold just a few days before the opening ceremony. Concerns over terrorism and construction delays at Olympic sites have hurt sales according to Chief Athens organizer Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki.

Despite all the ongoing concerns, Athens Mayor Dora Bakoylannis recently told reporters that “Athens is ready.”

According to Olympic project officers, the stadiums, swimming pools and arenas are complete, and the last major transportation project, a subway station in north Athens will open before the games.

However, safety concerns remain. The fact that much of the world tunes into the Games makes them an attractive target for terrorists trying to make a statement. At the 1972 Games in Munich, Germany, Palestinian terrorists took Israeli athletes hostage, demanding the release of prisoners in Israeli jails. A failed rescue attempt ended with the deaths of 11 Israelis, five terrorists, and a German policeman.

This year, more than 5 times the amount has been spent on security than in the 2000 Sydney Olympics; however, system failures and delays persist and have reportedly prevented the proper training of personnel. With more than 70,000 soldiers and police officers assigned, Prime Minister of Greece Costas Karamanlis believes that there is not need for concern and that everyone will be as safe as “humanly possible.”

### **Expected Highlights**

While the U.S. track team has battled controversy the past few months with alleged steroid use, the American swim team has captured headlines with some of the strongest competitors in the history of the sport.

One athlete in particular to watch is 19-year-old Michael Phelps. The U.S. team hopes he can make Olympic history by beating Mark Spitz’s 32-year-old record of seven gold medals set in Munich, Germany in 1972. Many people say it cannot be done, including Australia’s Ian Thorpe, who will face Phelps in the 200-meter freestyle.

Every sport will be featured this year on NBC and the network plans to devote 1,200 hours to coverage over 17 days, the longest continuous telecast of a sporting event in TV history.