

LONDON 2012 MERCURY | nie

ATHLETICS PART 1

Athletics is the largest single sport at the Games, and running is at the heart of its ancient roots

The history of running dates back to the Games' ancient origins, when a 200m foot race was the only event held. Modern athletics probably began to appear in 19th-century England and in 1871 the first modern athletics club formed in Suffolk.

An Englishman even designed the Athens tracks for the first modern Olympic Games, in 1896, where races were restricted to men.

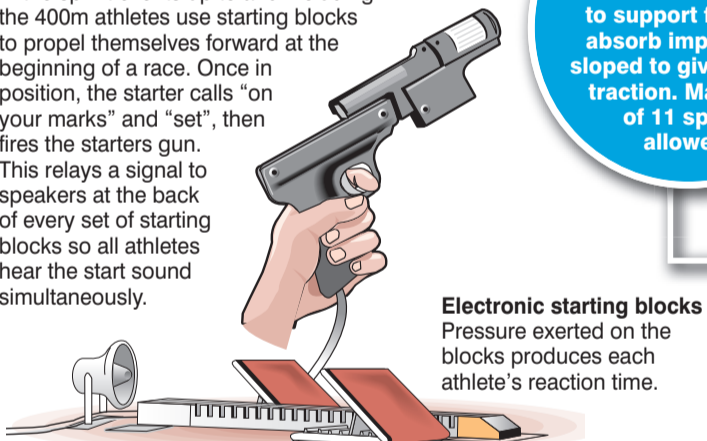
It took until 1928 for women's running events to be included and, today, the men's and women's Games programs are almost identical.

AT THE GAMES

Athletics is the largest Olympic sport and will involve about 2000 athletes who will compete in 47 events in London. Track is the main component with 24 events ranging from sprints, hurdles and relays to middle and long-distance races. The main venue is Olympic Stadium.

THE START

In the sprint events up to and including the 400m athletes use starting blocks to propel themselves forward at the beginning of a race. Once in position, the starter calls "on your marks" and "set", then fires the starters gun. This relays a signal to speakers at the back of every set of starting blocks so all athletes hear the start sound simultaneously.



CLOTHING

Stretch outfit hugs body, reduces wind resistance.

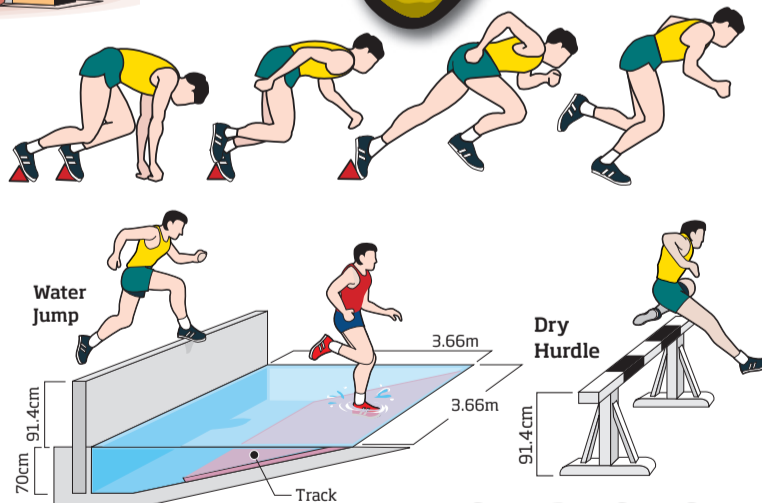
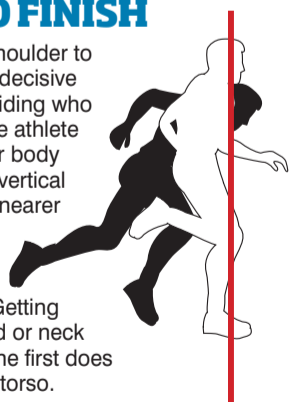
SHOES

Lightweight synthetic material designed to support feet and absorb impact. Toe sloped to give greater traction. Maximum of 11 spikes allowed.



PHOTO FINISH

The torso (shoulder to waist) is the decisive factor in deciding who has won. The athlete whose upper body reaches the vertical plane of the nearer edge of the finish line is judged the winner. Getting an arm, head or neck across the line first does not beat the torso.



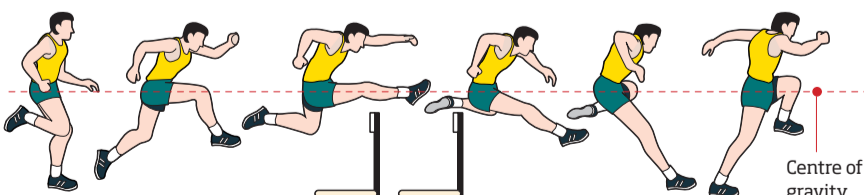
STEEPLECHASE

The steeplechase is run over seven laps. A total of 35 obstacles (28 hurdles and seven water jumps) are negotiated during a race.



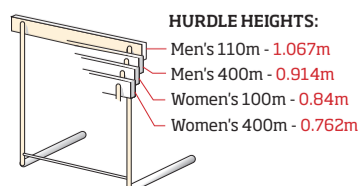
FACT FILE

Australia's first Olympian was Edwin Flack, who won the 800m and 1500m running events at the first modern Olympic Games in 1896.



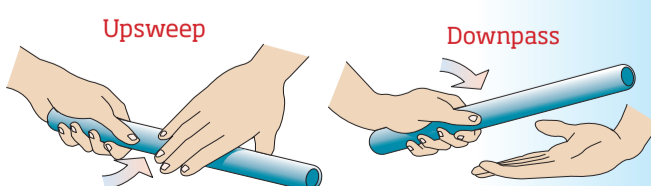
HURDLES

100m, 110m, 400m: These are sprint races made tougher because athletes must clear obstacles along the way. After a quick start, athletes lean forward and try to clear the 10 hurdles without breaking their stride.



Baton changes

Direction of run >



TRACK PROGRAM

MEN
100m, 200m, 400m, 800m, 1500m, 5000m, 10,000m, 110m hurdles, 400m hurdles, 3000m steeplechase, 4x100 relay, 4x400 relay.

WOMEN
100m, 200m, 400m, 800m, 1500m, 5000m, 10,000m, 100m hurdles, 400m hurdles, 3000m steeplechase, 4x100 relay, 4x400m relay.

ROUNDS & HEATS

Events are organised in two, three or four rounds, depending on the number of entrants. Those runners placing first or second in each heat qualify for the next round, along with the third-place finishers in most events.

LANES

Runners must stay within their lanes for all sprints, hurdles and the 4x100m relay events. The 800m and 4x400m relay begin in lanes and runners must stay within the lanes until they pass the breakline, which signifies they can move across.

EVENTS

SPRINTS: 100m, 200m, 400m
Sprinters drive hard from starting blocks, quickly lengthening their stride as they seek to reach top speed and then maintain rhythm and momentum to the finish line.

MIDDLE-DISTANCE: 800m, 1500m, 5000m, 3000m steeplechase

Runners in these events require speed and endurance to go hard early in their races, find their rhythm and then finish strongly.

DISTANCE: 10,000m

Runners look for economy of motion with reduced knee action and arm movement. They take shorter strides than sprinters but have great endurance and the ability to surge at different times during a race.

COMBINED EVENTS

There are two combined events on the Olympic athletics program – men's decathlon and women's heptathlon. Competitors in these events are regarded as the world's greatest all-round athletes.

HEPTATHLON: Seven events
Day 1: 100m hurdles, high jump, shot put, 200m
Day 2: Long jump, javelin, 800m

DECATHLON: 10 events
Day 1: 100m, long jump, shot put, high jump, 400m
Day 2: 110m hurdles, discus, pole vault, javelin, 1500m

RELAYS: 4x100m, 4x400m
Teams of four runners each run one leg of the relay, passing a hollow tube called a "baton" (30cm long, 4cm wide and weighing 50g) to a teammate after each stage. Quick, efficient baton changes are crucial for victory. Runners must exchange the baton within the 20m changeover zone. If a runner drops the baton, only the one who dropped it may recover it.