

# Using the Summer Olympics to inspire and motivate your young athletes

Held once every four years, the Olympics are a great opportunity for increasing kids' interest and participation in sports.

**Get ready for the 2012 Summer Olympics.** While the world's best athletes compete in London the rest of us will watch the Olympics – the opening and closing ceremonies, amazing athletes, and pomp and circumstance – in complete awe. American adults will tune into popular Olympic sports like swimming and gymnastics and some will discover new sports to try playing, like water polo or judo.

Likewise, the Olympics present a great opportunity for generating kids' interest in sports and increasing their participation on athletic teams. You can leverage the Summer Olympics for your own children or team.

Keep in mind, the Summer Olympics only happen once every four years so use the following ideas to make the most of them:

## Team game watches

Get the team together to watch a game. Remember, these are kids and they have shorter attention spans than your average Olympian, so make sure there are snacks and enough space for running around. Encourage kids to wear red, white and blue if you are watching the U.S. team. For younger children, you can hand out small American flags and supply markers and poster board to decorate Olympic signs.

## Inspirational Olympian stories

Motivate your team to dream big and work hard by sharing stories about inspirational Olympians. Tell your players about 2012 Olympic qualifier Kieran Behan, the second ever Irish gymnast to qualify for the Olympics. When he was 10 years old, surgical complications from removing a benign tumor left him in a wheelchair. After recovering, he fell off the high bar and was told he would never walk again. Three years later, after relearning basic tasks like sitting up and walking, Behan returned to gymnastics.

Give your players some history, too, and share track and field star Wilma Rudolph's story. The first American woman to win three gold medals was born in 1940, the 20th of 22

children, and had polio, pneumonia and scarlet fever as a young child. Rudolph wore a metal leg brace from ages 6 to 9, yet with determination and intense rehabilitation recovered and was winning running races by age 13. She accomplished all this as a black girl in the racially segregated South.

Take the inspirational stories a step further by engaging your players in a discussion about what makes an Olympian a hero. What values do the kids admire in Olympic athletes? Do the admirable qualities go beyond skill and extend to an athlete's overall character? This encourages kids to think about leadership and their personal goals both on and off the field.




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## Tracking athletes

Before the Olympics begin, distribute a U.S. Olympic team roster for your sport and ask each of your players to pick an athlete to track. They can read about their athlete online at NBC's Summer Olympics website and then track the athlete's performance during the Olympics. At team practices, ask your players how their athletes are faring. This encourages kids to watch the Olympics and keep informed about the U.S. team's progress.

## Mini Olympics

Hold your own Olympics during a practice. Divide your players up into teams of different countries and play a mini tournament. Make sure you come equipped with medals. (Small paper plates with yarn will do.) You can even write awards on the plates like "Good sportsmanship." If your sport isn't included in the Summer Olympics, hold Olympics-inspired races like baton relays or jumping contests that build coordination, speed and teamwork for any sport.

The above are just a few suggestions. Feel free to be creative and come up with your own ways to help instill the Olympic spirit in your players. Who knows, you may have the next Wilma Rudolph or Kieran Behan on your team! 



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