

ASIAN GAMES

The Asian Games are the most important continental multi-sport event for athletes from across Asia, held every four years. Officially recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the event ranks second only to the Olympic Games in terms of its significance and overall scale.
In terms of sports governance, the Games were overseen by the Asian Games Federation (AGF) from their inaugural edition - held in New Delhi, India, in 1951 - up until the 1978 event. Following the dissolution of the original federation, the organization and management of the Games have been under the aegis of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) since the 1982 edition.

From a geographical and statistical perspective, nine nations have, to date, served as hosts for the Asian Games. The historical record of participation encompasses a total of forty-six countries - a figure that includes the State of Israel, whose involvement in the event came to a permanent end following the 1974 edition, as a result of its subsequent formal exclusion from the Games.
The historical origins of the event can be traced back to the Far Eastern Championship Games, the initial framework for which was conceived in 1912. The inaugural edition of this precursor circuit took place in Manila in 1913, with six nations participating. By 1934, a total of ten editions had been held; however, mounting international geopolitical tensions led first to the cancellation of the 1938 event and, ultimately, to the definitive termination of the entire organizational project.

In the post-World War II period, on the sidelines of the 1948 London Olympic Games, delegates from China and the Philippines resumed discussions in an attempt to revive the Far Eastern Championship Games. In this same context, Guru Dutt Sondhi - an influential sports administrator and Indian representative to the International Olympic Committee - proposed moving beyond the old regional boundaries to create an entirely new, inclusive, continental-scale event: the Asian Games.
A crucial operational milestone was reached on February 13, 1949, with the formal establishment of the Asian Games Federation (AGF) and the selection of New Delhi as the host city for the inaugural edition. Although originally planned for 1950, significant organizational and logistical delays necessitated a strategic postponement.

Consequently, the first-ever continental games took place from March 4 to 11, 1951, in the Indian capital, bringing together 489 athletes representing 11 national Olympic committees to compete across six sports disciplines.

In terms of continental representation, all 45 National Olympic Committees currently affiliated with the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) have participated in the event at least once. However, the geopolitical landscape of the Games features certain peculiarities and geographical anomalies that are statistically significant:

- Transcontinental affiliation choices: Several nations with territory located on the Asian continent have opted to compete within different frameworks. This is the case for Russia (and previously the Soviet Union) and Turkey, both of which are firmly integrated into the European Olympic Committees (EOC) and the corresponding European Games. A similar situation applies to Egypt; despite its sovereignty over the Sinai Peninsula—which lies in Asia—the country has historically competed within the geopolitical framework of the African Games.
- The geopolitical trajectory of Israel: The case of the State of Israel represents the most complex juncture in the history of the Games. As a founding member of the original federation, the Israeli committee participated in the editions held between 1954 and 1974. Following mounting political tensions and pressure from the bloc of Arab nations, the OCA mandated the country's permanent exclusion in the early 1980s. After a long period of continental isolation, Israel was formally welcomed into the European sporting family (EOC) and has been a regular competitor in the European Games since their inaugural edition in Baku in 2015.

From a strictly technical perspective and in terms of the events included in the program, race walking made its official debut at the inaugural edition in New Delhi in 1951, consisting of two men's events: the 10,000-meter track walk and the 50-kilometer road walk. Following this initial appearance, the discipline faced a long period of exclusion, only being permanently reintroduced to the official program at the 1978 Bangkok edition.

From that ultimate edition onward, the men's competition established a consistent structure centered on the classic 20km and 50km road distances. This format remained largely unchanged until the recent Hangzhou 2022 Games (held in 2023), where the traditional 50km event was officially replaced by a mixed-team relay covering a distance of 35km.

A further and radical shift in the technical program occurred at the most recent edition in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan; this event marked the debut of both the Race Walking Half-Marathon (covering a distance of 21.097 km) and the Race Walking Marathon (covering the standard distance of 42.195 km).

The women's side of the discipline began its history at the 1986 Seoul Games, initially debuting with a 10 km road race. The format later underwent a significant technical adjustment starting with the 2002 Busan edition, when the distance was doubled to 20 km - bringing the women's event into line with international and Olympic standards. Much like the evolution seen in the men's category, the women's sector has also adopted recent global program changes; at the 20th edition, held in Aichi-Nagoya in

2026, female race walkers moved away from the traditional metric distances to compete in the newly introduced formats: the Half-Marathon Race Walk (21.097 km) and the Marathon Race Walk, covering the standard distance of 42.195 km.

🏅 Roll of Honor

Despite the clear and historic dominance of the Chinese school in terms of total titles, a statistical analysis of individual performances highlights the extraordinary consistency of two race walkers - the only ones in the men's category to have reached the podium at the Games three times:

-  Valeriy Borisov (Kazakhstan): Demonstrating a perfect, steady progression, he collected three medals—each of a different metal—across three consecutive editions of the Games. He began his streak with a bronze in Hiroshima (1994), advanced to a silver in Bangkok (1998), and ultimately reached the pinnacle by winning the gold medal in Busan (2002).
- Kim Hyun-sub (South Korea): A true paragon of competitive consistency, the South Korean athlete earned one silver and two bronze medals over the course of his long career at the Games.

Regarding overall records, the men's event features a notable statistical quirk: no race walker has ever managed to successfully defend a title, meaning no one has achieved the historic feat of winning two consecutive gold medals.

In contrast, the women's side featured two remarkable exceptions—both stars of the Chinese national team—who each established a clear continental hegemony spanning their respective generations.

-  Liu Hong: The absolute dominant force of the first decade of the 2000s; she claimed the top spot on the podium in Doha in 2006 and successfully defended her title in Guangzhou in 2010.
- Yang Jiayu: An exceptional athlete and world record holder in the discipline, she matched her compatriot's feat by securing consecutive victories in Jakarta in 2018 and at the subsequent 2022 edition held on home soil in Hangzhou (which took place in 2023).

The radical shift in technical parameters that took place at Aichi-Nagoya 2026 has inevitably etched the names of the first-ever winners of these newly introduced race distances into history.

In the inaugural Half Marathon Race Walk (21.097 km), the Chinese contingent secured a commanding double victory: 19-year-old Shi Shengji dominated the men's field, clocking a time of 1:23:32, while his compatriot Yang Liujing set the women's inaugural record at 1:33:40.

As for the Marathon Race Walk - covering the standard 42.195 km distance - the Games' record books opened with results reflecting a remarkable geographical diversity. In the

men’s event, local favorite Hayato Katsuki claimed the title with a time of 3:03:36. In the women’s event, the race had initially crowned Yasmina Toxanbayeva of Kazakhstan, who delivered a masterful performance with a time of 3:22:20.
However, the joy of her triumph vanished just before the medal ceremony; the Kazakh athlete was removed from the final standings following a formal technical inspection. She was disqualified for using footwear that did not comply with World Athletics regulations - a violation of Rule 5.2 (regarding shoes specifications) and, consequently, Rule 7.1 (concerning improper conduct).
After protest and appeal the official results shows at the top podium step, with the gold medal officially presented to China’s Danzeng Quzong. Her compatriot Ma Li moved up to second place, securing the silver. The bronze medal went to Japan’s Yukiko Umeno, who climbed into third position.

Looking at the overall medal tallies, the men’s competition at the Asian Games has historically been defined by China’s absolute dominance, with the nation amassing a haul of 15 gold, 11 silver, and 5 bronze medals. Far behind are the next-best nations, led by India - with a tally of 4 gold, 1 silver, and 3 bronze medals - and Kazakhstan, which holds third place with 2 gold, 2 silver, and 1 bronze.

The Chinese monopoly is even more overwhelming in the women’s events: across the twelve editions in which women have competed, the Chinese delegation has firmly locked down the top of the podium, claiming the gold medal on every single occasion. In this context, the disqualification of Yasmina Toxanbayeva at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Games carries significant historical weight; had her victory stood, it would have marked the first-ever non-Chinese win in women’s race walking - a continental barrier that, to this day, remains unbroken.

Despite this performance-based hegemony, the official record of the Games notes only one isolated instance of a retroactive disqualification for doping in the history of the discipline. The case concerned Chinese race walker Gu Yan, who had originally finished second in the 10 km road race in Hiroshima in 1994; a subsequent positive drug test led to her removal from the official records and the consequent revocation of her silver medal.

