

Centennial Olympic Summer Games
Atlanta USA 19th July – 4 August 1996

The 1996 Summer Olympics, formally known as the *Games of the XXVI Olympiad* and informally known as the *Centennial Olympics*, were held in 1996 in Atlanta, Georgia, United States. Atlanta was selected at the International Olympic Committee convention held in September 1990 in Tokyo, Japan. Atlanta triumphed over Athens, Belgrade, Manchester, Melbourne and Toronto.

Some felt Athens should have had the right to host the games because it marked the 100th anniversary of the modern Olympic Games. The IOC instead voted for Atlanta, predicting that Athens' infrastructure could not be improved enough in time to successfully host the Games. In 1997 Athens would eventually win the right to host the 2004 Summer Olympics. There were claims that executives in Atlanta had bribed the IOC officials. These claims were never substantiated, but they prompted other winning bids from Nagano in 1998, Sydney in 2000, and Salt Lake City in 2002 to be more carefully scrutinized.

Numerous observers considered the Games "over commercialized". Problems of traffic congestion sometimes made travel between venues difficult. More seriously, the Centennial Olympic Park bombing of July 27, 1996, killed spectator Alice Hawthorne and wounded 111 others, and elicited the death of Melih Uzunyol by heart attack. Even with the problems, IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch said, in his closing speech, "Well done, Atlanta", although he did not say they had been the best Olympics yet, as he did at every other Olympic closing ceremony while he was IOC president.

The games had a profound impact on the city of Atlanta and many consider the games to be instrumental in transforming Atlanta into the more modern city it has become since. Examples of this are the mid-rise housing built for the Olympic village. One of these complexes became the first residential housing for Georgia State University, and was afterwards transferred for use by the Georgia Institute of Technology. Other examples include Turner Field, which was a modification of the original Centennial Olympic Stadium, and where the Atlanta Braves baseball team made its home until a new stadium was built recently. Centennial Olympic Park was also built for the events and is still in use. Atlanta used no public money to finance the games, which cost US\$1.8 billion to host. It was the first city in Olympic history to use ticket sales, commercial endorsements, advertising, and private money alone to fund the hosting of the Olympics. The consequence of this, however, was that many felt that the games in Atlanta were over-commercialized and were less exciting than previous games.

Izzy the Mascot

Initially named Whatizit ("What is it?") at its introduction at the close of the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona, the animated character with the ability to morph into different forms was a departure from the Olympic tradition in that it did not represent a nationally-significant animal or human figure. 'He' originally appeared as a blue, tear-shaped "blob" with rings around his eyes and tail. He wore high-top sneakers and had star-shaped pupils. His arms and legs were also short with a toothy grin showing both rows of teeth. He was later modified to have longer limbs to give a more athletic look. After a very critical reception to Whatizit's introduction during the closing ceremonies of the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, ACOG began work to reshape the character specifically focusing on children, who were far more attracted to the character than adults.

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In addition to renaming him "Izzy", several changes were made to the mascot's appearance including losing the bottom row of teeth, adding a nose, making the tongue visible, and making the limbs longer, skinnier, and more athletic.

The three picture below show:

Badge handed out by Atlanta delegates at the Barcelona Olympic Games in 1992 – Whatizit – apparently nobody had any idea what this was about!!

Badge with the first iteration of Whatizit handed out later in the Barcelona Games which helped people understand what the first badge meant.

Pin from the Atlanta Games shows the now re-named Izzy and with changed characteristics.

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Significant events of the games

Muhammad Ali lit the Olympic torch during the opening ceremonies of the games and received his gold medal from the 1960 Summer Olympics (he had thrown his previous one into a river in disgust).

Slovene gymnast Leon Štukelj arises at the opening ceremony as one of the oldest living sportsmen in the world (age 97)

Naim Süleymanoglu becomes the first weightlifter to win three gold medals.

USA Dream Team III cruise to another Basketball gold medal win.

Michael Johnson wins gold in both the 200m and 400m, setting a new world record of 19.32 seconds in the 200m.

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Donovan Bailey of Canada wins the men's 100m, setting a new world record of 9.84 seconds at that time.

Marie-José Percec equals Johnson's performance, although without a world record, by winning the rare women's 200m/400m double.

At the age of 35 Carl Lewis takes his 4th long jump gold medal, his 9th in all.

Softball, beach volleyball and mountain biking debut on the Olympic programme, together with women's soccer/football and lightweight rowing.

Palestine was allowed to compete in the Olympics for the first time.

Cycling professionals were admitted to the Olympics, with five-time Tour de France winner Miguel Indurain winning the inaugural individual time trial event.

Michelle Smith of Ireland wins three gold medals and a bronze in swimming, but her victories are overshadowed by doping allegations, which are later reinforced as she is banned after failing a test in 1998.

Amy Van Dyken wins four gold medals in the Olympic swimming pool, the first American woman to win four titles in a single Olympics.

A record 197 nations, all current IOC member nations, take part, with a record 79 of them winning at least one medal.

Five athletes were disqualified for using banned drugs. A few more were reinstated since the drug they took had been declared illegal only a week before the Olympics.

Kerri Strug becomes an American heroine after bringing victory to the American female gymnastics team in spite of having to perform with an injury in the final event. Her gymnastics team, popularly known as the "Magnificent Seven", also included Shannon Miller, Amy Chow, Jaycie Phelps, Amanda Borden, Dominique Dawes and Dominique Moceanu.

Andre Agassi wins the gold medal in the tennis event. This helps him become the first male player to ever win the career Golden Slam. (completes his Career Grand Slam in 1999 when he wins the French Open singles title).

Kurt Angle of the United States won the gold medal in 100 kg (220 lb) freestyle wrestling while suffering a fractured neck. Angle would later go on to fame in Vince McMahon's World Wrestling Entertainment. He is widely regarded as one of the best athletes to ever participate in professional wrestling and the only Olympic gold medalist in the sport.

Deng Yaping of China wins two gold medals in Women singles and doubles of table tennis. She was also the winner of these two titles in 1992 Barcelona Olympics.

For the first time Olympic medals were won by the athletes from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Burundi, Ecuador, Georgia, Hong Kong, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Mozambique, Slovakia, Tonga, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

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Lee Lai Shan won a gold medal in sailing, the first and only gold medal that Hong Kong has ever won.

It was the first time that The United States 4 x 100m men relay was beaten in the final (by Canada) . The team had won each final they were in at all the other games.

Philately

The USA as host country issued two sets of stamps in sheet format and as booklets. The first sheet issued in 1995 celebrated the centennial of the Games and the second sheet in 1996 was 20 different stamps showing the Sports to be in competition. The interesting fact about this latter set of stamps was that they were printed on the gum side with information about the sports.

The USPS also issued a series of postcards with the same pictures as the stamps (PHQ cards?). An example of FD postmark is shown. (Javelin)

Stamps and Sheets were issued by 169 separate countries or Postal Administrations: from Aitutaki (Cook Islands) to Zaire.

The formats include:

Stamps – straightforward individual or stamp sets which can be about the Olympics in general or grouped for specific sports. This being the Centennial Games there are many ‘History’ depictions. Some interesting examples of changes which can also be made are when countries either bring out a new stamp with a picture of their medallist (s) or overprint the existing set with the names.

Souvenir Sheets – again these could be in the same categories as for stamps but often tend towards the History idea or the Olympic activities of the particular country.

Miniature Sheets – these tend to be:

A sheet of all of a set of stamps

A sheet of (say) 8 of the individual values in which case for a 4 value set you will need to find 4 sheets

Booklets – again these could be of all one value or a mixture

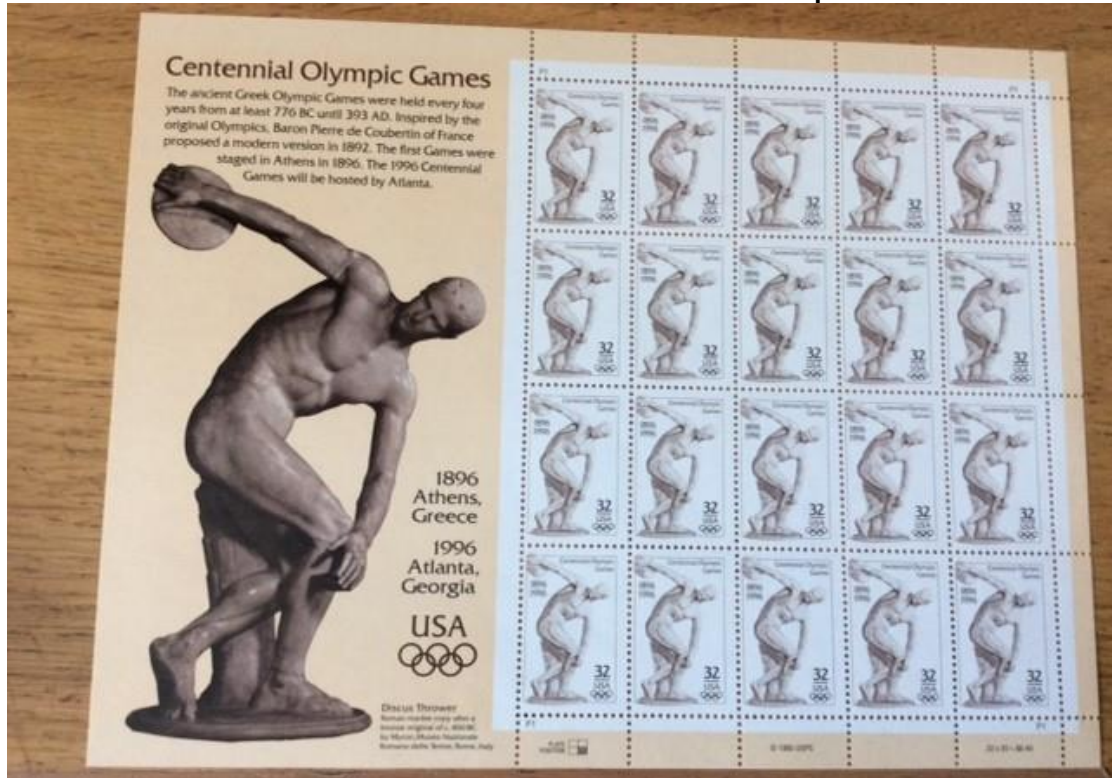
Perforated and Imperforated – all of the above may be either. It is normal for the unperforated to be harder to find and therefore more expensive.

Gold and Silver – stamps and sheets may be printed on gold and/or silver paper. These are actually the real precious metals in the paper and command a premium accordingly.

Some examples are shown – hope you like them!

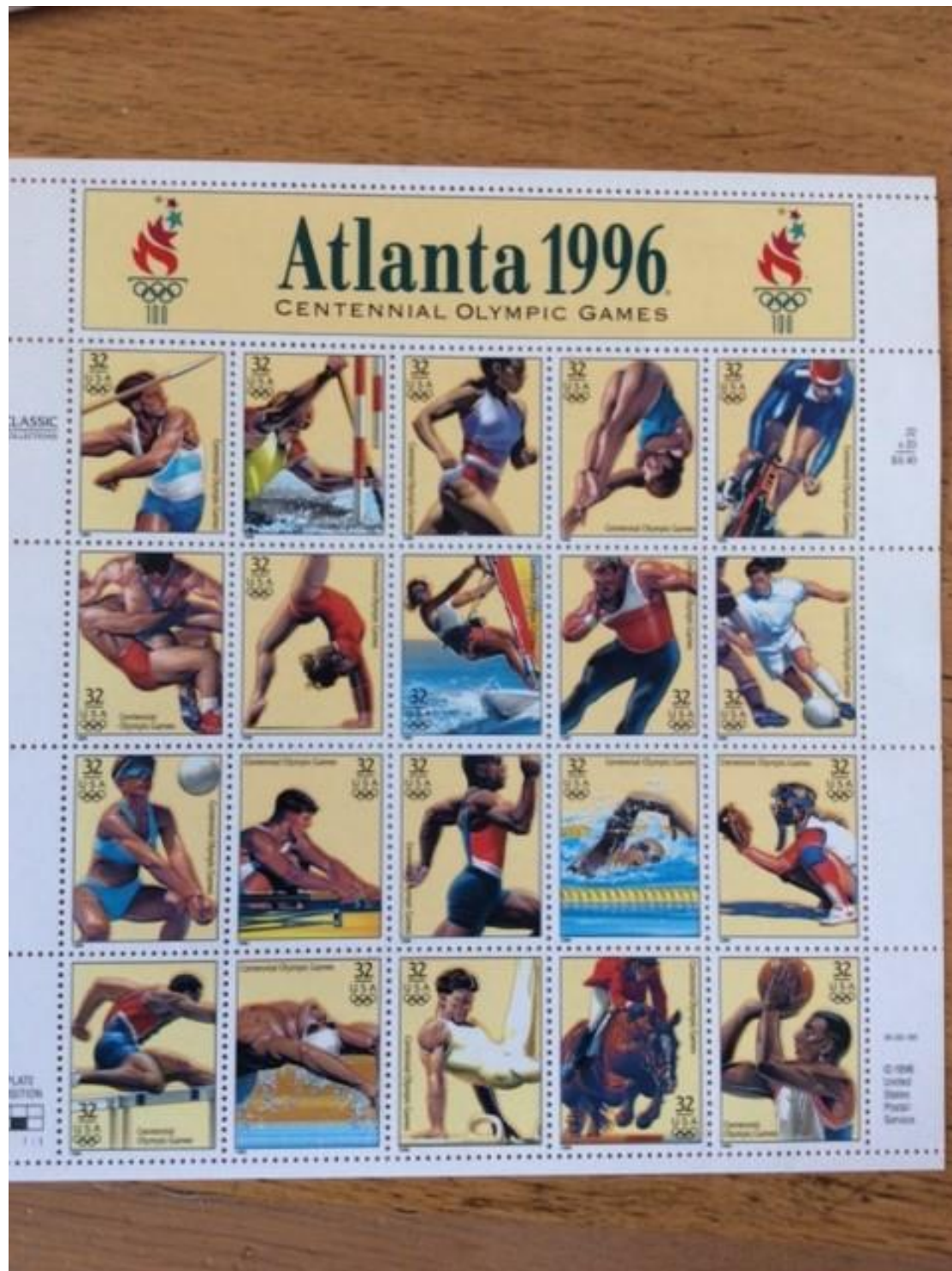
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The USA issues – 1995 Centennial sheet and booklet of 15 stamps



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1996 Sports Stamps





Example of the printing on the gummed side

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Individual stamp and matching postcard. The front of the postcard is shown next.

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Miniature sheet from Aitutaki (Cook Islands)

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Perforated and Imperforated sets from Zaire

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Souvenir (History) Sheet from Tanzania showing famous Olympians

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Yugoslavia set showing medal winners



Perforated and Imperforated Exhibition Souvenir Sheets from Uruguay

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Set from Venezuela – perforated and se-tenant

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Baseball and Fencing Souvenir Sheets from Guyana with Gold and Silver banding

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Gold and Silver stamps from Guyana with multiple sports

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Booklets with different values from Germany



Booklet from Finland with complete set se-tenant

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The GB Post Office produced a vast array of philatelic material for the Atlanta Games: one stamp set as shown above (mint, used and cover), but also a series of booklets of various sizes and denominations; 4 x 1st 10 x 1st 4 x 2nd 10 x 2nd as well as key values. Many of the booklets came with a variety of different cylinder numbers too!!

Some examples are shown here, including a set of three booklets with a scratch game where prizes could be won.

A proportion of the money raised from these items was given over to the British Olympic Association to help defray the costs of sending the GB team.

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History Souvenir Sheet (perforated) from Uganda showing Sebastian Coe



Set from Tonga showing original presentation and then subsequently overprinted

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Of course, no collection would be complete without stamps from Greece, which produced quite a lot of philatelic material to commemorate the Centenary. This sheet of 20 stamps is 4 x the set issued to prepare for the Bid process, which, as we know, they didn't win!