



## INTRODUCTION AND PARTY INVITATIONS

If your child has caught the excitement of the Olympics, here's how to channel it into some fun birthday games that will develop athletic skills, teamwork, and sportsmanship. And you won't have to spring for an Olympic-size stadium or swimming pool or take four years to organize events!

"The biggest goal of every Olympian is to encourage kids to use sports to foster short-term enjoyment and long-term health," says Sean O'Neill, who was a member of the U.S. Table Tennis Olympic Team at the Seoul and Barcelona Games.

"When we give clinics to kids, we try to do fun, safe activities that build hand-eye coordination and striking skills. These let the widest range of differently-enabled kids compete," adds O'Neill, who is now lead coach for the U.S. Paralympic Table Tennis Team.

"Kids can get frustrated if there's too much pressure placed on final outcome," he notes, adding that a mix of team and individual competitions is ideal. You can start the team-building process with these invitations.

## TICKET INVITATIONS

You will need:

- Construction paper (light blue on one side, white on reverse)
- Child-safe scissors and a ruler
- Magic markers

Cut out 5" x 7" sections of construction paper and use the ruler and magic marker to make them look like a regular ticket to a sporting event. You can customize the title for the ticket in this way: "Billy's Olympic Birthday Games."

List the time, date, and some of the events you'll offer. In the area of your ticket that would normally show the seating assignment, write down the name of a country the guest will be playing for. The Olympic logo's rings actually represent the five major regions of the world: Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and Oceania. You can form up



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to five regional teams if you don't want to use specific countries.

### DECORATIONS

If you have any Olympic memorabilia, display it in the party room to set the mood.

Hang up posters from around the world to give the party room an international atmosphere, as well as posters of sporting events or favorite sports figures.

Place sporting equipment on the party table as a centerpiece. Have fun by decorating the centerpiece with Ace® bandages, Bengay® ointment, crutches, and so on.

Choose patriotic red, white, and blue colors for your party tableware, including plates, napkins, cups, tablecloth, etc.

Fill the ceiling with helium balloons and twist streamers in red, white, and blue.

Hang flags from other countries or states on the walls.

Play Olympic music in the background to greet the guests.

### GAMES AND ACTIVITIES

Greet each "athlete" upon his or her arrival with a small gym bag containing a small towel, insulated bottle filled with a sports drink like Gatorade®, T-shirt, headband, wristbands, baseball cap, or other athletic apparel that matches the guest's team colors.

Before your games begin, try to give the kids an explanation of the Olympic ideals of peace, sportsmanship, and friendship. Then lead the teams in a short opening ceremony parade around the play area. A foil-wrapped citronella candle makes a great faux Olympic flame.

O'Neill recommends events that stress concentration as much as coordination. He also suggests activities that can be played outdoors or indoors in case of bad weather. Holding the party at a local park is an option if you don't have a large yard.

You will need:

- A grassy outdoor play area
- Yellow tape for finish lines
- Small marker flags for each team (matching the team colors again is a nice touch)
- A soft (but dense) small round foam-rubber ball
- A few light Frisbees®
- Ping-pong paddles and balls



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A whistle and measuring tape

A book of Olympic trivia

Gold-, silver-, or bronze-wrapped chocolate coins, ribbons, and strong clear tape

**The Nerf® Ball Shot Put** — Most kids would barely be able to lift (let alone toss) the heavy metal ball used in the real Olympic shot put event, but you can substitute a Nerf-type rubber ball in its place. Give each player one warm-up and one real toss and keep score of each team's total distance. This will keep the kids involved as they cheer their teammates on!

**Ping-Pong Paddling** — Using ping-pong paddles and balls, see which kid can hit the ball into the air for the longest time period. To add speed and drama, buy a large number of balls and paddles and have the teams line up and play at the same time. The team with the last player still hitting a ball wins!

If you have a ping-pong table, O'Neill recommends this fun game: set up empty plastic or paper drinking cups in the far corners of the table and see which players can get the most balls to land inside the cups.

**Indoor/Outdoor Foot Volleyball** — Stretch a rope three feet underneath a regular volleyball net. Have the players sit crabwise, with their knees bent and most of their weight on their palms, and try to kick a volleyball back and forth between the rope and the net. Follow rules of a regular volleyball game.

**Olympics Trivia Quiz** — This can be a formal event, or just used to pass time during rain delays or to break ties in athletic events.

Some relatively inexpensive equipment will let you attempt "real" Olympic events like basketball, volleyball, soccer, water polo, and team handball. Just about any other Olympic event can be modified to safely give every kid a chance to shine.



### The Awards and Rewards

Throughout these events, keep a running tab of the number of gold, silver, and bronze medals each team is winning. You can award gold, silver, and bronze medals (attach the foil-wrapped coins to ribbons with strong clear tape) to teams at the closing ceremony. Use a portable stereo to play the appropriate national anthems or stadium favorites like Queen's "We Are the Champions."

Make sure, however, to give each child some kind of recognition for taking part in the games. "It's a little-known fact, but every athlete who participates in an Olympics gets a medal just for playing," O'Neill notes. "While I didn't win a gold, silver or bronze medal at my two Olympics, those two participation medals mean more to me than any other awards I've received."



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Let the games begin!

### PARTY MENU

Given that the Olympic Games embrace all countries, it's perfect to serve an international party menu. Suggestions include:

- Chinese food served with chopsticks and fortune cookies
- Pizza, stromboli, pasta and meatballs
- Hoagie sandwiches with potato chips
- Taco bar with chips and salsa

Serve sports drinks like Gatorade, Powerade®, and strawberry-banana smoothies.

### A Logo and Torch Cake

You will need:

- Bundt®-type baking pans
- Red, green, blue, black, and yellow cake frosting
- Ice cream cones and cupcakes
- Tin foil and candles

You can incorporate the Olympic symbols into your birthday cake design. Just bake or buy five small ring-shaped cakes and carefully cut them so that they can be interlocked into the five-ringed Olympic logo shape. Frost each ring in one of the five colors above to replicate the Olympic logo. (Interestingly enough, the logo's five colors were chosen because they include a color from the flag of every nation of the world.)

Stick an ice cream cone in the center section and top it with a red-frosted cupcake. Wrap it in foil and add a big candle for a true Olympic torch effect!

### PARTY FAVORS

Send your Olympians home with personalized water bottles filled with chocolate coins.

Take pictures of the guests competing during your Olympic games and receiving their awards. Make sure to send these pictures to your guests in your Olympic thank you notes.



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