The "Olympics at Sports Reference" Website

Introduction

T he "Olympics at Sports Reference" website *(www.sports-reference.com/olympics/)* is a sports statistics website that gives details of all Olympic competitors, including date and place of birth, height, and weight, plus details of all results of Olympic competitions, preliminary and final.

Site Philosophy

The creation of the Olympics at Sports Reference website was based on the following principles:

- **The site should be well organised** – The information looked for should be located without wasting a lot of time.
- **The site should be fast** – Most of the pages are static, so you don't have to wait for information to be pulled from a database before viewing a page.
- **There should be as many links as possible** – Visiting Carl Lewis' page may lead to a question about the 1988 Summer Olympics, or a question about the USA's performance at the 1996 Summer Olympics, or a question about Olympic athletes that share a birthday with Lewis. In most cases it takes only one click to find the answer to your question.
- **The HTML and Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) used to create the site should adhere to the standards set forth by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)** – This means that the page renders properly in all browsers. In spite of this, the recommended browser for the Olympics at Sports Reference website is Firefox.
- **The site should be fun** – So, if you visit the page looking for the results of men's 100 meters sprint at the 1972 Summer Olympics, there is a good chance you will end up on a page that has nothing to do with your original query.

A closer examination of the website shows that all these principles not only apply in theory but do so in practice as well.

Contributors and Sources

The data provided in the Olympics at Sports Reference website is the result of over 120 years of research by a combined group of Olympic historians and statisticians. The group, termed the OlyMADMen, reflecting their maniacal devotion to the project, began in the late 1990s. Its members, who come from at least seven countries, all (or at least most of them) are members of the International Society of Olympic Historians (ISOH) and have been working on compiling databases of complete Olympic results and a database of all Olympians for many years. They found each other via e-mail and discovered that they were independently working on the same, or at least very similar, projects.

Much of the early data came from the publications of ISOH founder Bill Mallon, especially two of his books, *The Golden Book of the Olympic Games*, and *Total Olympics*. Also useful was his series of books on the earliest Olympic Games (1896-1920). This was supplemented by a data-

base of all Olympians developed by Arild Gjerde and Magne Teigen. Apart from these books and databases, sources have included virtually every known book on the Olympic Games, including all the Official Reports and Official Results, data in books and websites on National Olympic participation, and in books and websites on various Olympic sports.

Since 1998, the method of the group's work has been for each of member to work on one of the various aspects of the database and then send the work out for editing to all of the others. In this way, they have put in an estimated 100,000 man-hours of work to compiled the most complete and most accurate database of Olympic athletes yet known, comprising over 50 million records of data.

Homepage Form

The structure of the Olympics at Sports Reference homepage is very clear, with hardly any advertising distracting the user's attention, and the navigation through the website is very easy.

Figure. 1: The Olympics at Sports Reference entry page

Content Search

Starting from the website's entry page, users have various search options:

1. They can type, for example, the name of an athlete they look for in the Search field;
2. They can click one of the buttons in the top bar (e.g. "athletes") and proceed from there.
3. They can start by clicking one of the buttons in the left side bar (e.g. "Sports").

When using the third possibility and clicking "Athletics" in the list of sports, you will get the following overview shown in Figure 2.

When clicking now, for example, the Men's 100 metres, you will get a list of the Men's 100 metres medallists, starting with the most recent edition of the Games (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Athletics overview

Figure 3: List of the Men's 100 metres medallists

Clicking the year 2012, will provide a summary and the final standings of this event (Figure. 4).

When clicking, for example, the winner, Usain Bolt (JAM), you will get a biography of the athlete and a complete overview of his results at all Olympic Games in which he participated in (Figure 5).

This is only one string of possible searches that can be used to obtain information from the huge amount of data made accessible by the website. Readers are invited to play around with other search strings and will perhaps come up with surprising results which originally they did not look for.

Figure 4: Summary and the final standings of the Men's 100 metres at the 2012 London Summer Games

Figure 5: Biography and Olympic result list of Usain Bolt

Figure 6: Biographical entry for the German high jumper Wolfgang Killing

The topicality of the information provided by the Olympics at Sports Reference website is best symbolised by the athlete's age, which is always up-to-date to the day of the search. As far as the degree of detail is concerned, there is no difference between current and past athletes or between top ranked and low ranked athletes. This makes it quite interesting to look for less known Olympic athletes and recall their performances. This is illustrated in Figure 6 with one of the best German high jumpers of the 1970s, Wolfgang Killing, who is also an *NSA* contributor.

Conclusion

In summary, the Olympics at Sports Reference website is a treasure trove for information about the results and biographies of Olympic athletes. It is a website for both Olympic historians and non-experts interested in Olympic sports in general and athletics in particular. The website is clearly structured and easy to handle. The data is very complete, up-to-date, and detailed. All in all, the Olympics at Sports Reference website is ideal for getting lost in and having fun with!

Reviewed by Jürgen Schiffer