

Nauru at the Olympics

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INTRODUCTION

Strip mining of phosphate deposits has left much of the island of Nauru a wasteland and, like other Pacific countries, Nauru is threatened by climate change. And now, the island is at the heart of the controversy over abuses of asylum seekers at its detention centre, which was set up by Australia. They are still struggling with the growth of population since WWII (still around 10,000) and the high rate of diabetes and obesity after traditional island lifestyle and diet was abandoned in favour of imported food. Nauru stands second highest prevalence of diabetes in the world. However, the quest for sports has been intense.

Nauru has been relatively notable for its weightlifting, as one of its participants, Marcus Stephen, served as president of the country after his retirement from the sport. The country has previously won a medal at every edition of the Commonwealth Games it has contested.

BIRTH OF OLYMPICS

After dominating at the Commonwealth Games in weightlifting, the quest to participate at the Olympics rose. But for a “country” to participate in the Olympics, it must have a National Olympic Committee (NOC) approved by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

Under the leadership of the Hon. Vinson Detenamo, the Olympic movement began in Nauru in the early 1990s. The Olympic Committee was established in 1991 and talks with the International Olympic Committee started in the same year.



Figure 1. Issued on the event of entry into IOC.



Figure 2. Medals given by NOC to athletes participating in olympics in 1996.

In May 1994, Nauru presented its bid to join the IOC, and in September 1994 the nation was accepted, clearing the path for participation in the 1996 games in which Nauru athletes participated for the first time in the Olympics.



Figure 3. Celebrate first Olympics.



Figure 4. Nauru's first Olympics 1996.

PARTICIPATIONS

1996 (Atlanta, USA)

Nauru participated officially for the first time at the 1996 Summer Games in Atlanta, USA, sending three athletes to represent them in weightlifting. Quincy Detenamo, Gerard Garabwan, and Marcus Stephen were Nauru's first ever Olympians. Most of the Nauruan Olympians are weightlifters. One of these, Mar-

Figure 5. In the honour of visit of IOC President.



cus Stephen, competed for Samoa four years earlier at the 1992 games. As Nauru had no Olympic Committee at the time, he was able to successfully apply for Samoan citizenship and was allowed to compete for Samoa.



Figure 6. Sydney Olympics 2000.



Figure 7. Olympic Torch Flight cover from Nauru to Solomon Islands.

2004 (Athens, Greece)

The three Nauru's athletes at this Olympic games were weightlifters, including 2002 Commonwealth champion Re-anna Solomon. The best finish came from Yukio Peter who was ranked 8th, and the other Itte Detenamo who was ranked 14th. Both male athletes were the youngest in their respective classes.

2008 (Beijing, China)

The sole athlete to represent the nation was Itte Detenamo in the weightlifting. He did not earn a medal but finished with a personal best. Nauru could have sent participants in swimming and athletics also, but chose not to as there was no national governing body of swimming, and the nation lacked basic infra-

LIST OF FLAG BEARERS AT OLYMPICS:

#	Event year	Season	Flag bearer	Sport
1	1996	Summer	Marcus Stephen	Weightlifting
2	2000	Summer	Marcus Stephen	Weightlifting
3	2004	Summer	Yukio Peter	Weightlifting
4	2008	Summer	Itte Detenamo	Weightlifting
5	2012	Summer	Itte Detenamo	Weightlifting
6	2016	Summer	Elson Brechtefeld	Weightlifting

2000 (Sydney, Australia)

Two athletes, Marcus Stephen and Sheeva Peo (first women athletes to participate in the Olympic), participated at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney. The Olympic torch for the first time was passed through Nauru on May 25, 2000 which was flown from Micronesia to Solomon Islands by Flight West Airlines.



Figure 8. Beijing Olympics 2008.

structure and competitive athletes in order to compete in athletics.

2012 (London, UK)

The delegation consisted of two participants: Sled Dowabobo in the men's lightweight judo con-

test and Itte Detenamo in the men's super-heavyweight competition. Dowabobo qualified as one of Oceania's highest ranked judo competitors while Detenamo made the Games based on his qualifying performance. Detenamo was the flag bearer for both the opening and closing ceremonies.

2016 (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

Elson Brechtefeld, competing in weightlifting, was the Nauru flagbearer. Mr. Uera followed behind. That completed the Nauru Olympic team with two athletes.

Nauru, with a population of around 10,000, was the smallest country to compete at the Rio Games. When its delegation marched into Maracana Stadium for the opening ceremony, you could miss it if you blinked. Team USA, on the other hand, was impossible to miss. It was a teeming and radiant mass of 550 athletes that included global celebrities such as Michael Phelps and Serena Williams. The U.S. Olympic team travelled to Rio with a support staff of 1,500 people. There are team doctors, chiropractors, infectious-disease specialists, massage therapists, cooks, drivers and eight sport psychologists. There is a physical therapist whose only job was to practise cupping – the healing technique that left circular marks on Mr. Phelps – for the swim team.

CONCLUSION

Nauru earns a distinction for being the smallest nation (by population) in the 206 member International Olympic Committee.

Nauru had high hopes for winning its first medal in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. However, the qualified athletes will need to remain motivated to bring home their first Olympic medal the postponed Games take place. ☒