



Golf & rugby voted into Olympics

Golf and rugby sevens have been voted on to the programme for the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro.

The International Olympic Committee's executive board voted to include both two months ago and the full membership confirmed the decision on Friday.

Golf was passed by 63 votes to 27 while rugby sevens had 81 votes in favour and eight against.

IOC president Jacques Rogge told delegates: "Time will show your decision was very wise."

Golf's inclusion was welcomed by Europe's Ryder Cup captain Colin Montgomerie, who spoke to the IOC in Lausanne in June.

"I am so delighted to hear that golf has been approved to be in the Olympics in 2016. I am proud to have been a part of the process and it is a credit to everyone who has lent their support to this process," he said.

"I have made my support very clear and I think this is a very significant moment for the game of golf, and all of the players who are lucky enough to compete in the 2016 Olympic Games will be part of a truly unique experience."

The Republic of Ireland's three-time major winner Padraig Harrington told a news conference in Copenhagen that the Olympics would soon surpass the majors in importance.

"I do believe in time the Olympic gold will become the most important event in golf and I don't believe it will take that long," he said.

"In the four years between the Olympics there will be 16 majors, so winning gold will be that much more special."

Bernard Lapasset, president of the International Rugby Board, said the Olympics would be "the pinnacle of our sport".

"This is a historic moment for our sport and for the global rugby community, who were united in support of our campaign," he added.

"We are excited and honoured to be joining the Olympic Games and I would like to thank the IOC members for believing in our Olympic vision and our values and recognising that rugby sevens is a perfect fit for the Olympic Games."

The inclusion of the two sports was welcomed by British Olympic chief Andy Hunt, who added that both would provide medal opportunities for Great Britain in Rio de Janeiro.

"We are delighted that both golf and rugby sevens have been given the opportunity to take part

in the ultimate celebration of sport at the Rio 2016 Olympics," said the British Olympic Association chief executive.

"We currently have a wealth of talented British male and female players moving through (golf's) amateur ranks and are very excited at the prospect of what these young athletes could achieve at Olympic level.

"It's encouraging for us that Wales won the men's 2009 Rugby Sevens World Cup final in Dubai earlier this year."

It's win-win for both sides - golf is such a global sport

Golf star Tiger Woods

Players from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will all be eligible to play for the Team GB sevens team and Rob Andrew, the Rugby Football Union's elite rugby director, said England were looking forward to joining forces with the Celtic nations.

"The thought of joining with the other home unions to make a Team GB is very exciting and on behalf of the RFU and the elite rugby department I am delighted that sevens rugby for men and women has been included," he said.

England sevens captain and IRB world sevens player of the year Ollie Phillips described it as "fabulous news" adding he was "doing cartwheels round my flat".

The vote on the inclusion of the two sports - which includes the 2020 Games as well as 2016 - had originally been due at 1100 GMT at the IOC's congress in Copenhagen, Denmark.

It was delayed while some IOC members expressed concern about the process by which the sports had been selected for inclusion by the IOC's executive board.

But when the vote was finally taken both passed with flying colours, although the majority in favour of golf was somewhat smaller than that in favour of its fellow returnee to the Olympic family.

Both sports were part of the Games programme in the early part of the twentieth century before being dropped, and golf returns to the Games for the first time since the St Louis Olympics of 1904.

One of the main issues had been whether top players would compete in the Olympics but the game's brightest star, Tiger Woods, had indicated on Tuesday he would play.

We want to play our part in strengthening and growing the Olympic movement - rugby is reaching out

Ex-Argentina captain Agustin Pichot

Golf's presentation video included stars of past and present including Jack Nicklaus, Phil Mickelson, Ernie Els and Woods.

"It's win-win for both sides - golf is such a global sport. I couldn't think of a better sport to be part of the Olympic Games," said Woods.

The presentation party on the day included 16-year-old Italian Matteo Manassero, the 2009 British amateur champion, and American Michelle Wie, who said it would be a "dream" to play in the Olympics.

Wie said: "I can dream about being an Olympian, and I can dream of doing something not even Tiger or Ernie has ever done, that is to make the putt to win the gold medal."

Nicklaus, an 18-time major winner, said: "All of us who have spent our lives playing and enjoying the game of golf fully understand why it deserved a spot on the Olympic programme.

"Now the sport I have always called the greatest game of all can be shared with the rest of the world on the greatest stage in sports."

Rugby union was last part of the Olympics in 1924 in the full 15-man version of the code, and will return to the Games in the truncated seven-a-side version.

Rugby sevens was represented on the day by stars including All Black legend Jonah Lomu, former Argentina captain Agustin Pichot, Kenya captain Humphrey Kayange and Australia women's captain Cheryl Soon.

A number of delegates preferred to praise the sport rather than question the panel, but among the queries posed was whether the game's top stars would play in Rio.

Lomu, a former Commonwealth Games gold medallist, said: "To see my sport in the best arena would be fantastic for rugby, men's and women's. We are very passionate about it - you just have to say where we have to play and the best players will come.

"I can speak for all of them - they will turn up."

Soon said it would be "a privilege" to play in the Olympics, while Pichot added: "We want to play our part in strengthening and growing the Olympic movement - rugby is reaching out."

Story from BBC SPORT:

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