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Retracing Roots - London 1948 Olympic Sailing Competition



1948 Olympic Games Poster
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Olympic Sailing Competition

London, Great Britain

The Olympic Games was held in London for the second time following the success of the 1908 Games.

Sailing was held in Torquay, Torbay on the south west coast of Great Britain. It was an inevitable choice as the venue because it was free from strong tides and navigational hazards so there was not a lot to be gained by local knowledge.

The Bay itself was large enough to make it practicable for all the events to occur at the same time.

Due to the distance from Torquay to London an Olympic Sailing Opening Ceremony was held in Torquay at the ruins of Torre Abbey. After 107 runners bearing the Olympic torch from Wembley entered, President of the IOC Mr. J. Sigfrid Edstrom spoke of the symbolism of the Olympic Torch.

The 6-metre continued to be sailed at the Olympic Games whilst the Dragon, Firefly, Star and Swallow were on show. View full results from the 1948 Olympics on the ISAF website [here](#)

(http://www.sailing.org/olympics/london2012/about/history/london_1948.php).

Elvstrom's Reign Begins

The Danish Olympic Committee had some reservations about sending Paul Elvstrom (pictured right) to London 1948 as the 18-year-old spoke no English and was shy and sensitive.



After a shaky start in the Firefly, which saw Elvstrom retire after a port and starboard incident with a Finnish competitor, he bounced back scoring RT-6-3-12-5-1-1 to clinch his maiden gold.

Bomb Scare Favour

The Bahamas Durward Knowles had to sail for Great Britain in 1948 as the Islands did not have separate representation. For Knowles to reach the UK he had to ship his Star boat from Nassau to Miami, trail it to New York before a crossing on the Queen Mary to Great Britain.

Knowles would have missed his crossing on the Queen Mary but for a delay due to a bomb scare.

London 1948 was Knowles' only Olympics for Great Britain, he finished fourth, and he went on to sail in a further seven Olympics for Bahamas picking up a Star bronze in 1956 and Star gold in 1964.

What They Said

"Before I left Denmark, everybody said, "If you will not be the last we'll be happy," and I felt I couldn't disappoint anyone, and so when I had to leave the course [In Race 1] I was feeling very low inside. Then I said, "OK, you shall not be the last," and in the next race I came sixth.

"After that it went quite well." Paul Elvstrom (Elvstrom Speaks On Yacht Racing)

The Future

The Games became truly international in 1952 with 69 nations competing. Sailing took place at Harmaja, not far from Helsinki and the Finn class made its Olympic Games debut.

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