

Sportswear Textile Industry

The history of sports probably coincides with the military training existence, which aimed in keeping fit and in good fighting condition. The earliest signs (15.000 BC approx.) of sport activity (sprinting and wrestling) have been found in the Lascaux caves in France. In Egypt, 4000 year-old monuments indicate that a number of sports activities (wrestling, long jump, swimming, rowing, shooting, fishing, ball games, athletics etc) had already been developed and regulated. The first time in history that sports were formally instituted was in 776BC in Olympia and the games were called Olympiads (also known today as Olympic Games). The games took place in Olympia every four years and they lasted until 393AD. In the first Olympiad consisted of a unique sprinting game. More sport events like wrestling, long jump, javelin throw, discus and many others were added shortly afterwards. In the middle age entire villages and towns were competing to each other in rough and sometimes violent ball games like Shrovetide and mob football in England, caid in Ireland, calcio Fiorentino in Italy and many others (Wikipedia, 2016).

In each period of time and each region the sports clothing varied, for example the clothing was sometimes fancy, as “kariginu” for the ball game kemari in Japan, or very light, as in the ancient Egypt. In the early Olympic Games the athletes were wearing a light type of loincloth held up by a band that went around the athlete's waist. It is not known for sure how it is started but it is known for sure that from 720BC the athletes in Olympic Games were competing naked, as an expression of their masculinity and their strength (Swaddling, 1999).

In 1896 the International Olympic Committee revives the ancient Olympic Games in Athens, Greece. Since then, the Olympic Games are organized every four years with a few exceptions. Olympic Games was the first global sport event and we can investigate the evolution in sportswear clothing by following the sportswear in the Olympic Games.

In the first modern Olympic Games only men could take part while women starting taking part a few years later, in the second modern Olympic Games. The outfit for men at that time was shorts and short-sleeved cotton shirts, while women wore something more “formal” and less “convenient” due to the social position of women at that time. In 1904 the usual apparel was thigh-length baggy shorts and cotton vest and in 1908 the specific apparel is part of the rules. For the marathon, competitors “must wear complete clothing from the shoulder to the knees”. In the Olympic Games of Stockholm in 1912 some women competitors demonstrate a controversial short knee-length skirt in gymnastics and women swimming events become part of the Olympic

program. The heroism of women in World War I puts pressure to accept female competitors with respect. In 1922 the Fédération Sportive Feminine International is established and Suzanne Lenglen, a French tennis player, innovates by wearing a knee-length skirt at Wimbledon tournament. In the Olympic Games of Paris the traditional wool fabric starts to be replaced by lighter and cooler fabrics such as satin, silk and jersey cotton. Sportswear becomes fashionable and women swimsuits get more practical. In the Australian Olympic Team in 1932 both women and men demonstrate tracksuits as patriotic official uniforms. In 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, Dassler Brothers persuade Jesse Owens to wear a pair of their track spikes. Jesse Owens won four gold medals in front of the eyes of Adolf Hitler and created a lot of attention not only for his “fist” in the medal ceremony but for his new spike-shoes. In the World War II, Dassler Brothers join the Nazi Party and after its end each brother followed his own career. The oldest brother (Adolf) creates the Adidas brand and the youngest brother (Rudolf) creates Puma brand. After World War II stretch jersey fabrics are more widely used and female sportswear converges very much to the male sportswear.

In 50s and in 60s the rise of synthetic fabrics like elastane, spandex and lycra allows the competitors to wear more functional and fashionable sportswear. The next decade leotard shows up in women’s gymnastics and trousers begins to be the outfit for women on and off-duty. In 80s, men shorts are high-cut revealing hips and slightly baggier compared to 70s tight hotpants. Yet, elastane and spandex is used by almost all sportsmen and sportswomen. Although sponsors exist since the ancient Olympic Games, the Olympic Games in 1984 in Los Angeles were the first to be fully funded by corporations such as Puma, Nike, Adidas, Reebok etc. Teams and individuals are wearing uniforms emblazoned with their sponsors.

In 90s technology starts to get involved in athletes clothing. In 1992 in Barcelona Olympic Games trendy tracksuits are manufactured in order to keep athletes warm between their races. Yet, the athletes apparel is particularly the same for both men and women. In Sydney 2000 we see the futuristic “swiftsuit” for sprinters and “fastskin” for swimmers. The technological innovations allows greater ease of movement through the air and water, respectively. In Athens 2004 we see high-tech streamline zip-up bodysuits and in London 2012 we see huge corporations competing in sportswear. For example, Nike introduces the super aerodynamic suit for athletics “Pro TurboSpeed”. Adidas and Puma produce superlight with breathable hi-tech material running shoes specialized for each running event and Speedo creates a swimming suit which reduces drag in the water even more (Julie, 2013).

Overall we may say that in our days, sportswear is a combination of technological innovation, stylish fashionable outfit and, for a lot of people, a way of life.

Questions

What was the apparel of athletes in the ancient Olympic Games since 720BC?

- a) Light clothing
- b) Heavy clothing
- c) No clothing

Which was the first Olympic Games totally funded by Sponsors?

- a) 1886 Athens
- b) 1982 Los Angeles
- c) 2016 Rio De Janeiro

References

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