

**Zeitschrift:** Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand  
**Herausgeber:** Swiss Society of New Zealand  
**Band:** 82 (2016)  
**Heft:** [5]

**Artikel:** Switzerland at the Olympics - then and now : clocks, bells and Olympic Games  
**Autor:** Cooper, Belinda / Zuber, Anita  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-944308>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 18.04.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

## Switzerland at the Olympics – then and now

### Clocks, bells and Olympic Games



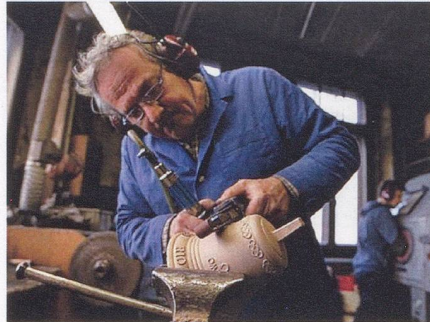
The difference between a Silver and Gold medal could be as little as a second – a vital second for the Olympian and his or her country's pride. That precision falls to Swiss watchmaking manufacturer, Omega, who has been the official time-keepers of the Olympic Games since 1932. Everyone recognises the Omega name, logo and its role in sports.

However, few people know the origin of the bells used since 1896 to signal the final lap in running and cycling races. For the 2016 Olympics Omega ordered 21 hand-forged bells from the Bondeau foundry, a small family business in La Chaux-de-Fonds in the Jura mountains, founded in the 1830s by Piedmontese immigrants. This family has been making Olympic bells since the Moscow games of 1980 and as with the cowbells they make, each bell has a unique mould and is made using technical skills which have hardly changed over the centuries. So next time you watch a race and hear the final lap signalled, remember the Swiss bell-makers of Jura.

#### Switzerland and the Olympics from 1896 to 2016

Switzerland has sent athletes to compete in every Summer Olympic Games since the inaugural 1896 Games. It has won a total of 185 medals from 28 Games, an average of just under 7 per Games. Add another 138 medals for Winter Olympics and Switzerland is in the top 10% of medal winning countries over 50 Games and ranked 17th in the world. Top sports have been Alpine skiing, gymnastics, bob sled, rowing and snowboarding.

The first Swiss athlete to compete was the Neuchâtel-born gymnast Louis Zutter who travelled privately to Athens in 1896 and came home with 2 silver medals and one gold. However, his achievement passed almost unnoticed. This was because “the Olympic spirit was still slow to develop in Switzerland,” historian Marco Marcacci explains,



“partly due to difficult international relations, the First World War, the cancellations of the Games in 1916 and partly to Swiss tradition” where physical activities were practised and competed through the national federations of shooting, skiing, horse-riding and gymnastics, rather than at the Olympic Games.

It wasn't until 1923 when the Swiss physical education association (Asef) and various national federations signed an agreement with the Swiss Olympic Committee that Switzerland began seriously competing and seeing results: 25 medals in Paris in 1924, 17 in Amsterdam in 1928 with the greatest successes in gymnastics, rowing and wrestling.

The 1936 Berlin Olympics saw another shift in thinking “where people became aware of the role of sport in building national cohesion, mobilising youth and making it part of military training,” according to Marcacci. In the post war years, the military character of physical education lessened and a more scientific approach was realised in the 1960s with the founding of the Institute of Sports Science. By the 1970s sport featured in the Federal Constitution and the “Youth and Sport” movement began. Since then there has been a growing emphasis on the importance of results and with good facilities and generous funding, Switzerland's athletes are managing to achieve creditable results.



#### 2016 Olympics in Rio

This summer, Switzerland sent 105 athletes to Rio – 59 men and 46 women – its largest group in the past 20 years. They participated in 17 different sports. The youngest was 18 year old golfer Albane Valenzuela and the oldest was 53 year old equestrian Paul Estermann. A total of 21 Swiss athletes also took part in the Rio 2016 Paralympics with athletics and paracycling being Switzerland's particular strengths.

Guilia Steingruber was the flag-bearer at the Opening Ceremony and Nino Schurter at the Closing Ceremony.

A total of seven medals were won. Congratulations to the following participants:

*Fabian Cancellara*  
Gold Medal in Cycling – Men's time trial

*Mario Gyr, Simon Schuerch, Simon Niepmann and Lucas Tramer*  
Gold Medal in Rowing – Lightweight Men's Four

*Nino Schurter*  
Gold Medal in Mountain Biking – Men's Cross Country

*Timea Bacinsky and Martina Hingis*  
Silver Medal in Tennis – Women's Doubles

*Nicola Spirig Hug*  
Silver Medal in Women's Triathlon

*Heidi Diethelm*  
Bronze Medal in Shooting – Women's 25m Pistol

*Guilia Steingruber*  
Bronze Medal in Gymnastics – Women's Vault

Sources: <http://www.swissinfo.ch> / <http://www.reuters.com> / <http://olympic-medal-count.pointafter.com/116/Switzerland>

Researched and compiled by  
Belinda Cooper and Anita Zuber.