

The South Pacific Games **The Sporting Event of the Pacific**

The end of World War II saw many former territories and possessions leave the confines imposed by their colonial rulers and become independent nations. At about the same time (1947), the South Pacific Commission (SPC) was created to foster regionalism among the Pacific Islands. In 1957, the SPC agreed to begin a triennial, Olympic-style sporting event, which would be called the South Pacific Games (SPG). All the countries of Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia, with the exceptions of Australia and New Zealand, would take part.

An SPG Council and Charter were developed and the first SPG were held in Fiji (they had the best facilities at the time) on August 29, 1963. About 750 athletes and officials from 13 island territories and nations participated in the inaugural event. The 1966 Games took place in Noumea, New Caledonia. Fourteen territories and nations sent twice as many participants as had taken part in the first Games, to compete on a new track and field complex built for the SPG.

Guam's first participation was in the 3rd SPG at Papua New Guinea, in 1969. The 3rd Games were opened by the Duke and Duchess of Kent in Port Moresby, who presided over elaborate opening and closing ceremonies, which set the standard for future Games. So as not to compete with the 1972 Olympics in Munich, the schedule for the Games was accelerated and the 4th SPG was held in 1971 in Tahiti. For the first time, over 2000 athletes and coaches from 14 Island nations and territories participated, and enjoyed The host country's new stadium and swimming pool.

Guam won the right to host the 5th SPG, but the event was marred by bad weather, and an island preoccupied with housing Vietnamese refugees fleeing the takeover of their country. Fifteen participating territories and nations sent nearly 2,000 athletes and officials to take part in the 1975 Games. The schedule for the SPG Games was changed to a four-year format, to be held the year before the Olympics. In addition, the SPG Mini Games was developed for the smaller Pacific Islands that were unable to host large contingents. The Mini Games are also held on a four-year schedule, two years after the main Games. Tennis was introduced in the original SPG in Fiji in 1963 and since then has become a compulsory sport at all South Pacific Games and South Pacific Mini Games with the highest number of countries participating in it. These Games in Norfolk Island will be the 6th South Pacific Mini Games with the two previous being in Pago Pago , American Samoa in 1997 and Vanuatu in 1993.

In 1979, Fiji was once again the site for the SPG. Over 2,600 participants from 18 countries were in attendance at the 6th Games, the first Mini Games were held in Honiara, Solomon Islands in 1981. Western Samoa (or Samoa as it is now called) hosted the 7th SPG in 1983, welcoming more than 2,400 athletes. The People's Republic of China helped build facilities for the Games. New Caledonia was the site for the 8th Games, but their second hosting of the quadrennial sporting event took place under a cloud caused by the turmoil of the Kanak independence movement.

In 1991, the Games moved back to Papua New Guinea, where, for the first time the Games were set to take place in two different cities, Port Moresby and Lae. The SPG returned to Tahiti for the 10th Games in 1995, and once again, politics filled the headlines as nuclear testing continued in Mururoa Atoll. Over 3,000 athletes and officials participated. The games came back to Guam in 1999, for the largest SPG ever. Over 3,500 athletes and officials from 21 island territories and nations took part in 23 different sporting events held over a 15-day period. At the close of the 11th Games, Guam passed the torch to Fiji to begin the cycle again in the first Games of the new millennium in Fiji in 2003.