



WHY ARE THERE SO MANY SWIMMING EVENTS ?

Bonjour. My name is Pierre. Pierre Baron de Coubertin and I know everything about the Olympics. Really. For example do you know why there are so many swimming events? I do!

It all started in 1844. In London. In that year the annual swimming competition took place and for the first time two native americans competed. They were called **Flying Gull** and Tobacco. I think it was because the English wanted to show that they were the best swimmers in the whole wide world. But, surprise, surprise, Flying Gull won easily and Tobacco finished second in spite of his obvious smoking habits. The audience was flabbergasted. The superior british were humiliated. How could this be? Well the reason was very simple.



The British swam the highly inefficient breaststroke while the native americans swam a **front crawl**. Swiftly the proud British Swimming Society issued a statement: Flying Gull's way of swimming produced to much splashing. So it was wrong, un-European and barbaric. And from that moment on there were two ways of swimming. The wrong and barbaric freestyle and the right way: the breaststroke.

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So during the first few modern Olympics both Free Style and breaststroke were programmed. There were also some very strange events like **underwater swimming** which people did not like because of lack of spectacle. And just like today the breaststroke was very inefficient, slow and definitely less sexy than the freestyle. Let's be honest. If **Johny Weismuller** had won the Olympic 100 m breaststroke instead of the Freestyle he never would have gotten the role of Tarzan. He probably wouldn't even have been able to escape the alligators.



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Because the breaststroke was slow, all kinds of people started fiddling with the technique. Especially people from the University of Iowa. There was this guy called Jack Sieg who introduced the Dolphin Kick and David Armbruster who experimented with bringing the arms forward over the water. It all became very confusing. You never knew what was allowed, who was going to win and with what technique. **A decision had to be made.**

So the wise people of the international swimming association took a long hard look at all those techniques and introduced The butterfly stroke!

Now there were three ways of swimming (not counting the backstroke ofcourse because that is something for people who like to look at the sky when swimming). One thing led to another...

Creative minds lobbied together with not so talented swimmers for the medley and this all resulted in a lot of events and long days in the swimming pool, but because there were so many golden medals to win, it also created legends like: Mark Spitz, Matt Biondi, Nathalie Coughlin and ofcourse **Michael Phelps**. The Baltimore Bullit.

With eight golden medals in Bejing he became the greatest Olympic Athlete of all time. But he did win 5 medals on a butterfly event. **So, let's look at this again...**

If Flying Gull would have been more polite and had chosen not to humiliate the proud English, than the English would have discovered the free style themselves. And then the breaststroke would never have become Olympic. And no Olympic breaststroke would have meant no butterfly stroke either. Because the butterfly is nothing more than a mutant of the breaststroke created by people who do not like to play by the rules. And no butterfly would have meant only 3 medals in Bejing for Phelps. So I guess every night, before he goes to sleep, Michael Phelps thanks Flying Gull in his prayers.

Or so he should...

