

# Medal Tally Ranking Systems

The common method of determining the success of countries at the Olympic Games is a ranking order based first on the number of gold medals won, then silver and bronze. This method is used by the IOC and most media outlets during the Olympic Games, but there is still no 'official' method.

Usually the country that has led in total medals also led in the gold count - when did it not? Exceptions are the 1896, 1912 and 1964 Summer Olympics when the United States finished first in gold medal count but second in the overall medal count. Also in 2008, the US finished first in total medal count but second to China in the overall based on gold medals. A criticism of counting only gold medals to determine success is that it implies that winning silver and bronze, or making the final, is worthless.

Another commonly used method (the predominant method used in the USA) is to rank countries based on the total medals won. In this case, a silver and bronze medal count the same as the gold medal - is a silver or bronze really worth as much as a gold medal? Certainly not to the athlete.

There are numerous possible other ways of ranking success at the Olympics, with some of the alternative medal tally ranking systems having merit. A more extreme system that has been tried is to count all gold medals won, so the results from team sports count the number of individual medals given out. This totally biases countries which win medals in the team sports.

Then there are weighted systems which assign differing amounts of points to each of the gold, silver and bronze medals. You can see a discussion of the weighted methods which compares a few variations using this method. Other ranking methods have factored in demographic factors such as population size and economic factors such as gross domestic product (GDP). You can see a discussion of the demographic methods.

Below are listed quite a few alternative medal ranking systems, and a discussion of any differences that they may make.

# Medal Tally Ranking Systems

## *All Ranking Systems*

Here are some of the ranking systems that have been devised.

A *weighted* system of some sort seems like the best system, but it is not as simple to implement as either the gold first or total medals method.

- **gold first method** — based first on the number of gold medals, then silver and bronze. Does silver and bronze have no value?
- **total medals** — based on the total number of medals (gold, silver and bronze). This method gives equal rating to gold, silver and bronze, which does not seem a fair system.
- **total gold medals** — counting all the gold medals won, including counting the medals for each individual athlete in team sports.
- **Improvement Rating** — based on percentage improvement from previous Games result.
- **Compared to expectations** — there are several groups that forecast or predict the medal won for each country based on factors such as population, GDP and previous performances, at prior Olympics and competitions leading up to the Olympics.
- **Fibonacci weighted point system (3:2:1)** — gold 3 points, silver 2 points, and bronze 1 point.
- **Exponential weighted point system (4:2:1)** — gold 4 points, silver 2 points, and bronze 1 point.
- **London 1908 weighted point system (5:3:1)** — gold 5 points, silver 3 points, and bronze 1 point.
- **LOF weighted point system (5:3:2)** — gold 5 points, silver 3 points, and bronze 2 point.
- **Topend Sports weighted point system (6:2:1)** — gold 6 points, silver 2 points, and bronze 1 point.
- **per-capita demographic ranking** — number of medals is divided by the population of the country.
- **per-GDP demographic ranking** — number of medals is divided by the gross domestic product (GDP) of the country.