

NIKKEI GAMES

“GAMES FOR THE GENERATIONS”

HISTORY


The year was 1928, and Japanese-Americans were rumbling through the “Roaring 20’s.” Unprecedented growth within the Southland, especially in the Los Angeles basin, created a need for many more community activities. Among the many traditions born during this period were the Junior Olympics, initially sponsored by the Japanese Athletic Union. Little did our forefathers realize that their thirst for healthy competition and friendship through these track and field events some seventy years ago would foster a legacy for many generations.

These “Olympics” initiated the formation of numerous small track clubs to organize area participants—some with corporate or company names. Because these games would draw so many Isseis and Niseis from various areas, great friendships and rivalries were created. The “Olympics” could only be interrupted by one of the greatest conflicts in the history of man, World War II.

The Junior Olympics were resurrected in 1948; however, due to the six years layoff and the dominant culture’s attitude toward “things that were Japanese,” the next few years’ games were anemic at best. Then, in 1952 after battling with the United States Olympic Committee regarding name usage, the Japanese-American Citizen’s League took up the torch of revitalizing what would be known as the “Relays.”

Larger track clubs with even more corporate and business sponsorship were soon developing as participation within the community increased. Friendships and rivalries again blossomed as records continued to be set and then broken. The Nisei Relays flourished for decades, until it too became a victim of changing attitudes and apathy. The starter’s gun sounded for the last time in 1992.

In 1994, The Orange County Nikkei Coordinating Council addressed the issue of resurrecting the “Relays” again. OCNCC examined many of the reasons for the untimely death of the “Relays” and decided to change the focus; hence, The Nikkei Games: Games



for the Generations. As the renamed title implies, all ages within the Nikkei community would be encouraged to participate. The initial Nikkei Games' 300 participants ranged in age from two years old Yonsei toddlers to 80 years old Issei and Nisei grandparents and great-grandparents. The day's events included; the long jump, the 50 yard dash, a bean bag throw, gate ball, two-on-two basketball, and the Family Daikon Relay. Last year's games had over 3000 contestants representing the five continents participating in many events, which included: track and field events; karate tournament; martial arts demonstrations; adult coed 4-on-4, as well as youth 3-on-3 basketball tournaments; softball tournament; junior and senior golf tournament; volleyball tournament; Kendo tournament; youth All Star baseball games; and various Taiko group demonstrations.

The 2017 Games will be held July through August at California State University, Long Beach, and at many other venues throughout Orange and Los Angeles counties. With competition spread over four weeks, the "Games" promise to be bigger and better is becoming a reality. Most of the Games events will again be held in the Pyramid, one of our nation's newest and most recognizable sports' venues. Again, the martial arts (judo, kendo, and karate,) will compete side by side in their own tournament formats. The golf tournament will be held at the beautiful and challenging Strawberry Farms Golf Course. For youth baseball, the best 9-10 year olds, 11-12 year olds, with the addition of the 13-14 year olds, and high school players from Orange County will compete against those of Los Angeles County. With the cooperation of many Southern California sport organizations, the Games are truly on the way to becoming the greatest Nikkei sports festival in our country.

The Orange County Nikkei Coordinating Council and all of the sponsoring organizations are inviting you to join us in celebrating the traditions of our past and to help preserve it for the future: **The Nikkei Games: Games for the generations.**