



#18 - Lights

Nacer Zorgani: There's one emblematic moment in the history of the Olympic and Paralympic Games that represents more than the sporting competition, and that's the lighting of the Olympic and Paralympic Flames. And when we say Olympic and Paralympic Flames, we mean the Torch Relay, which is another key feature of the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games! To talk about it with us today, I'm joined by Grégory Murac, Deputy Director of the Olympic and Paralympic Torch Relay, and Coline Guillou, who is in charge of the Olympic and Paralympic torchbearers. And we also have the privilege of having one of the four captains of these Torch Relays, Mona Francis – a para-triathlete who took part in the Tokyo Games and is in contention for the Paris Games – with us today. Thank you for joining us!

All: Hello Nacer!

Nacer Zorgani: Thank you very much for joining us. I'll start with you, Grégory, where does this tradition come from? Can you tell us about the origins of the Olympic Torch Relay?

Grégory Murac: The Flame was extremely prevalent in the Ancient Games, and then when Baron Coubertin relaunched the Modern Games, it wasn't initially part of it. In 1936, for the Berlin Games, the Torch Relay made its appearance. Since then, the Olympic Torch Relay has been held every four years, during the Summer Games. The flame is relit in Olympia, at the Temple of Hera, by the Hellenic Olympic Committee, which then entrusts the flame to the Organising Committee in Athens, at the ancient Panathenaic Stadium, who take it home and embark on a months-long Relay before the opening ceremony.

Nacer Zorgani: So now we know how the Olympic Flame comes to life. What about the Paralympic Flame, how does that work?

Coline Guillou: The Paralympic Flame came into being in 1958 after the Second World War. A German doctor, Ludwig Guttman, created the Paralympic Games by starting competitions involving people wounded in the War. It was in 1972, at the International Stoke Mandeville Games near London, that the Paralympic Flame appeared, and the first Paralympic Torch Relay took place in Seoul in 1988. This Paralympic Flame is unique in that it can be divided into several Flames, and this is what will happen to our Flame in Paris in 2024.

Nacer Zorgani: In a podcast devoted to Marseille, we spoke to Delphine Moulin, Director of Celebrations. She told us about the arrival of the Flame. But once the Flame arrives in France, what happens next?

Grégory Murac: The Olympic Flame will be arriving from Greece, so we've chosen to bring it back on board the *Belem*, which is a lovely three-masted ship belonging to the Caisse d'Épargne Foundation. And so it will be arriving in Marseille on 8 May 2024 at a huge party that will be organised on the Old Port. And you can be sure that our friends in Marseille know how to throw a party! And then on 9 March, we'll be touring Marseille's emblematic sites all day, before moving on to all the *départements*. So all in all, 65 *départements* will be involved in the Torch Relay.

Nacer Zorgani: With 65 French territories and five overseas territories, the Torch Relay will be able to showcase the diversity of our country. At the Albertville Games, we had the world's fastest flame in the air, as it came to France on board the Concorde. You'd think that for the Paralympic Flame, we'd have the fastest under the sea and on rail, but that's not necessarily the case. How's it all going to happen, Coline?

Coline Guillou: So, in fact, it's lit up in Stoke Mandeville, a town near London, and it's going to cross the Channel for the first time in the history of the Games, going under it. But it's not going to take the train, it's going to use a service road to get to France, and a team made up of British athletes and para-athletes is going to pass it on to another team made up of French athletes and para-athletes...who'll bring it to Calais!

Nacer Zorgani: Grégory, Coline, it's clear that this will involve practically the whole of France. Why is it important to cover as many parts of the country as possible?

Grégory Murac: As we were saying, the Olympic Torch Relay heralds the start of the Olympic Games celebrations. As you know, our slogan is "Games Wide Open", so we felt it was extremely important that as many French people as possible should be able to see this powerful symbol of the Olympic Games.

Not all regions will be lucky enough to host sporting events, but the Torch Relay will still criss-cross a large majority of our country, as 85% of the French population will be less than an hour away from the Torch Relay route. The route of the Games will also allow us to highlight our region and all its beauty. We'll be going to Mont-Saint-Michel, we'll be seeing the castles in the Loire, and we'll be going to Chamonix to celebrate 100 years since the first Winter Olympics. In short, all the landscape diversity that France has to offer. And then there are five overseas territories: Réunion, French Guiana, Polynesia, Guadeloupe and Martinique.

From the outset, our President, Tony Estanguet, was determined to showcase France in all its diversity, and to ensure that as many French people as possible could see the Flame. And today, we're very happy with the progress we've made.

Nacer Zorgani: It requires a lot of energy, of course. Can you tell us about the values of the Torch Relay, Coline?

Coline Guillou: The first of the three founding energies of the Olympic and Paralympic Torch Relay is the energy of sport – obviously, sport has been at the heart of our vision from the outset. There is also the energy of the regions. As Grégory said, to cross as many territories as possible, the Paralympic Flame will also arrive in Calais, divided into 12 Flames, the aim of which is to reach Paris in four days and cross 12 territories, which is unprecedented for a Paralympic Flame. Finally, there's the collective energy embodied by the torchbearers, who we'll be talking about shortly.

Nacer Zorgani: Who are the torchbearers of the Flame?

Coline Guillou: They are 11,000 ordinary people with extraordinary stories. Contrary to popular belief, the torchbearers are not just athletes who will be taking part or who have taken part in the Games. They are also people like you and me who have an extraordinary story to tell, one that is linked to our three energies: sport and the regions, as we've said, but also the collective effort.

Nacer Zorgani: 11,000 people, so it's a big team and every team has a captain. In this case, there are four of them: Florent and Laure Manaudou, Dimitri Pavadé and Mona Francis. And Mona Francis is with us today! When you were told that you were going to become captain of the Olympic and Paralympic Torch Relay at the Games in France, on home soil, what went through your mind?

Mona Francis: Well, it was a huge surprise to receive the phone call. I didn't even know that the Paris 2024 Organising Committee knew about me! It was also a surprise because I'm lucky enough to be captain of the Torch Relay, along with three other athletes with a huge list of achievements, so it was a bit intimidating at first.

Nacer Zorgani: And what does that mean for you?

Mona Francis: So personally, I'm extremely proud, and so are the people around me. I can say that it's practically all my family talks to me about. So I'm very proud. And I'm going to try to rally as many people as possible around the shared values related to the Olympic and Paralympic Flame. And above all, I'm going to try to provide a little more visibility to my sport and to all triathletes in general.

Nacer Zorgani: Do you have any memorable anecdotes to share with us from the history of the Olympic and Paralympic Relays?

Coline Guillou: The Torch Relay, carrying the Flame, is always an emotional moment... Even for people who are used to it. Being in front of an audience is a unique moment and some torchbearers can sometimes panic! We had one, for example, who set off in the wrong direction with his torch lit! He was quickly caught, of course. But there are also some beautiful and powerful moments. For example, there was the story of a marriage proposal during the London Torch Relay!

Nacer Zorgani: That's what reminds us that, in the end, these are everyday heroes, because as you said, we're going to look for future torchbearers among the population. As this is the Volunteer Programme podcast, Mona, you worked with volunteers in Tokyo, and you told me earlier that they played a decisive role. Do you have anything you'd like to say to the volunteers?

Mona Francis: I can talk about my experience at the Tokyo Games. We saw that the volunteers were really essential, helping to show us the way, but they also kind of played the role of the fans because there weren't any fans there due to the pandemic. So what I'd like to say to them is thank you! Thank you for making yourself available, for being there for us, and then I'd like to tell them to make the most of every moment, to try and store up as many beautiful memories as possible.

Nacer Zorgani: Grégory, Coline, we're coming to the end. I'd like to ask you to say a few words to the future volunteers who are listening to us today.

Grégory Murac: I'd like to start by thanking them, because it's true that they're going to have the chance to enjoy an incredible experience by taking part in the Olympic and Paralympic Games. And because we completely understand that organising such an event is impossible without volunteers. These are people, men, women, young and old, who will be giving up their time for their passion. It's true that they will be welcoming the world, France will be welcoming the world, and so they will be the first faces we see. I thank them!

Coline Guillou: I totally agree with what Mona and Grégory have just said: thank you. I can't wait to see the volunteers with their smiles, because they're really the ones who make the Games smile. The first impression, as Grégory just said

Nacer Zorgani: The first face of the Games, the best ambassadors of the Paris Games! Mona, thank you so much for being with us. We hope to see you in 2024 with a medal. Good luck with your preparations and thank you for being with us, captain! Grégory, Coline, thank you so much for being with us. Good luck for the different stages and for this great journey that awaits you and us.

As for those of you who are listening to us, perhaps, and I do mean perhaps, you too will be involved in or touched by the Torch Relays. Thank you very much, see you soon.