It may surprise most of you that the long and winding road for Table Tennis to join the Olympic Games began as early as 1931. According to the minutes of the Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the 1931 World Championships in Budapest on 15 February, Paragraph 11b:

"a discourse on the Olympic Games was received from Dr. Mezo (sp?) and it was agreed to explore the possibilities outlined." Unfortunately the ITTF Archives do not have a copy of this discourse.

The next mention of the Olympics is in the 1932 English Language Secretary (Montagu) Report, paragraph 7:

"Circular sent to all countries, as per A.G.M instruction, asking for information on Olympic Games situation. One reply received. Japan has written to Los Angeles proposing for Games this year. British Olympic Council recommends, if any action at all is desired, proposed as supplementary (not principal) game, Berlin 1936."

Then in the 1932 AGM minutes, paragraph 8, just one sentence: "Steps are to be taken to secure the holding of Table Tennis events simultaneously with the winter sports at the Olympic Games Berlin 1936."
The minutes of the AGM held at the 1937 World Championships in Baden, Austria summarize a resolution and vote on the Olympic issue:

"It was decided to instruct the Advisory Committee to get in touch with the Preparatory Commission for the forthcoming Olympiad at Tokio with a view to the inclusion of Table Tennis in that Olympiad. All countries in favor except England who were against."

At the 1938 World Championships: "It was reminded that the Secretaries had been instructed to take steps towards the inclusion of Table Tennis in the Olympic Games. They were instructed to write immediately to the Japan TTA on the subject."

The ITTF was inactive during the war years, but there was a significant position statement on the Olympic issue made by ITTF President Ivor Montagu at the 1946 London Conference, hosted by Montagu to revive the ITTF after the war. When directly asked for his position, Montagu replied:

"I am opposed to the inclusion of Table Tennis in the Olympic Games. ... Firstly, I think the Olympic Games should be restricted to Athletics and similar events, where athletes vie with each other, not extend to sports of Football or Lawn Tennis type.

"Second, I think sports that do not have their own world title competitions need the Olympic Games. We, and similarly Lawn Tennis with the Davis Cup, do not need the Olympics. For us they are a duplication. Lawn Tennis dropped out of the Olympics after, I think, 1924 [sic 1928]. Third, it is not certain that if we applied we would be successful. If we were refused it would be a rebuff and a humiliation to the game."
Montagu's reasoning requires some analysis. Table Tennis is indeed a sport where athletes vie with each other, though back in the 1940s most players were hardly the well-conditioned superb athletes of Olympic standards.

Regarding his second point, Lawn Tennis did in fact withdraw from the Olympic community, shortly before the 1928 Games began in Amsterdam, and did not reappear until 1988. Lawn Tennis leaders felt that the Olympics would become an unwanted rival to Wimbledon. However, it is difficult to accept this argument given the 4-year Olympic cycle, and the participants would certainly gain national and worldwide recognition, as well as an experience of a lifetime. Mr. Ollen of Sweden cited the benefits of receiving a share of funds for training Olympic athletes.

Montagu's third point was certainly a legitimate concern, though A.K.Vint noted the potential prestige of acceptance. A vote was then taken: Yes: Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands, Jersey. No: Czechoslovakia. Undecided: England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland and France. Montagu then proposed that each member nation's Olympic Committee should be approached for their opinions, and the results referred to the Advisory Committee for a decision.

Some member nations had concerns about Table Tennis joining the Olympics because of the amateur issue, since the ITTF distinction between amateur and professional was eliminated in 1935. Montagu dismissed the issue at the 1946 London Conference:

"On the amateur question, we can easily comply with Olympic requirements in this respect by simply meeting and agreeing by Federation decision that no players shall be included who have been paid for playing."
Then in the 1954 AGM minutes, para 7:

"The Secretary reported a communication from the Swiss Association requesting discussion on the possibility of having Table Tennis included in the Olympic Games. After the President had given an explanation of the Federation's past decisions on this subject, considerable discussion took place, indicating that there were divergences of opinions. It was eventually agreed to accept the President's proposal to ask the incoming Advisory Committee to get as much information as possible from the representatives of Belgium, Luxembourg and Switzerland, all of whom were members of their respective National Olympic Committees, and report to the next Annual General Meeting."

There is further mention that those representatives met after the first AGM session, and had produced a "Valuable report" to the Advisory Committee. Unfortunately a copy of this report has not yet been found.

When Montagu retired in 1967, H.Roy Evans of Wales was elected ITTF President, and we find an Olympic mention in the Biennial General Meeting (BGM) minutes from the 1967 World Championships in Stockholm:

"14. Olympic Committee: The President explained that in relation to the French Association's proposal to investigate the possibility of affiliating to the International Olympic Committee, the Federation would take all steps to secure the fullest information on the implications of such a step. Many delegates spoke of the importance to them of membership of the I.O.C., and it was pointed out that actual participation in the Olympic Games need not be regular so that there was little danger to the authority of the ITTF World Championships. The officers agreed to seek information in all quarters on this important subject."
Ten years later the ITTF Constitution was amended to comply with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) requirements. The amendment proposal passed by a vote of 65-12, clearing the way for recognition of Table Tennis by the IOC. As a result in November 1977 the ITTF was notified that Table Tennis was officially recognized by the IOC.

The 84th session of the IOC was held in Baden, 1981, and Table Tennis was admitted to the summer Olympics program, beginning with the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul, South Korea. Since then Table Tennis has distinguished itself in the Olympic Games in Barcelona 1992, Atlanta 1996, Sydney 2000, Athens 2004, Beijing 2008, London 2012 and Rio 2016 with ever increasing worldwide television viewing audiences: Table Tennis ranked number 5 in all sports at the Athens Olympic Games!

Beginning in Beijing 2008, the format of the Table Tennis competition changed. The Doubles events were replaced by a Team event, similar to the Davis Cup format in Tennis: 2 Singles, 1 Doubles and then 2 Singles, where a single player can only play in two of the contests. In the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo, Mixed Doubles will be added to the Table Tennis events.

The Chinese men and women have certainly distinguished themselves in Olympic Table Tennis, winning 28 out of a possible 32 Gold medals. The last Gold medal that they lost was in 2004 Athens, when Ryu Seung Min (KOR) defeated Wang Hao in the Men’s Singles final.

Following is a summary of Olympic results:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>WS</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>WD</th>
<th>XD</th>
<th>MT</th>
<th>WT</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seoul 1988</td>
<td>YOO Nam-kyu KOR</td>
<td>KIM Kwi-suk KOR</td>
<td>ENK Landk SWI</td>
<td>CHEN Jing CHN</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barcelona 1992</td>
<td>J-O Walkner SWE</td>
<td>J-P Qudin FRA</td>
<td>MA Wangqi CHN</td>
<td>LI Man CHN</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta 1996</td>
<td>Liu Guanghong CHN</td>
<td>WANG Tao CHN</td>
<td>JING Ting GBR</td>
<td>DENG Ying CHN</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney 2000</td>
<td>KONG Linghai CHN</td>
<td>J-O Walkner SWE</td>
<td>LIU CHN</td>
<td>WANG Nan CHN</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Last Olympic Games using 38mm ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athens 2004</td>
<td>Ryu Sung Min KOR</td>
<td>WANG Hao CHN</td>
<td>WANG Long CHN</td>
<td>CHEN Jing TPE</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Last Olympic Games using 40mm ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing 2008</td>
<td>MA Li CHN</td>
<td>WANG Hao CHN</td>
<td>ZHANG Yan CHN</td>
<td>Discontinued</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Team events, played Doubles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London 2012</td>
<td>Zhang Jie CHN</td>
<td>WANG Hao CHN</td>
<td>DISHAN YING CHN</td>
<td>Discontinued</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>China Olympic Gold; 26 out of possible 28 finals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio 2016</td>
<td>ZHANG Jie CHN</td>
<td>LI Minjia JPN</td>
<td>KIM Song J PK</td>
<td>Discontinued</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed Doubles to be resumed at Tokyo 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokyo 2020</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>China again wins all 4 Gold medals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>