

# Ready for Rio

Top athletes from around the world are preparing for the 2016 Summer Olympics in Brazil.



Hurdlers compete at the 2012 Summer Olympics.

The excitement is building for the 2016 Summer Olympic Games. Every four years, a different city hosts the world's biggest sporting event. This year's

host is Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Rio, as it's often called, will be the first city in South America ever to host the Olympics. More than 10,000 athletes from nearly every country will compete in 42 sports, ranging from archery and swimming to sailing and soccer.

The Games don't begin for a few months, but a lot of people are already getting fired up. The Olympic torch was lit in Olympia, Greece, on April 21. The city was the site of the first Games nearly 2,800 years ago.

The torch will be flown to Brazil on May 3. Over the next

three months, torchbearers will take turns carrying the Olympic flame through more than 300 cities and towns. On August 5, a final torchbearer will

light the Olympic cauldron in Maracanã Stadium in Rio to signal the official start of the Games. It will remain lit until the curtain closes on this year's Olympics, on August 21.

But a lot needs to happen before the Games get under way. Many American athletes are still taking part in competitions called trials that will determine whether they make the Olympic team. On the next few pages, you'll meet some athletes who hope to have the golden touch in Rio.

—by Joe Bubar

## Fast Facts: Brazil



**Population:** About 204 million, the fifth highest in the world

**Size:** 3.28 million square miles—slightly smaller than the U.S.

**Official Language:** Portuguese

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## Simone Biles

**Sport:** Gymnastics

**Hometown:** Spring, Texas

At each Olympics, some athletes become worldwide superstars. Many people predict that gymnast Simone Biles will be one of them this year. The 19-year-old has won the gold medal in the all-around competition at the last three gymnastics world championships.

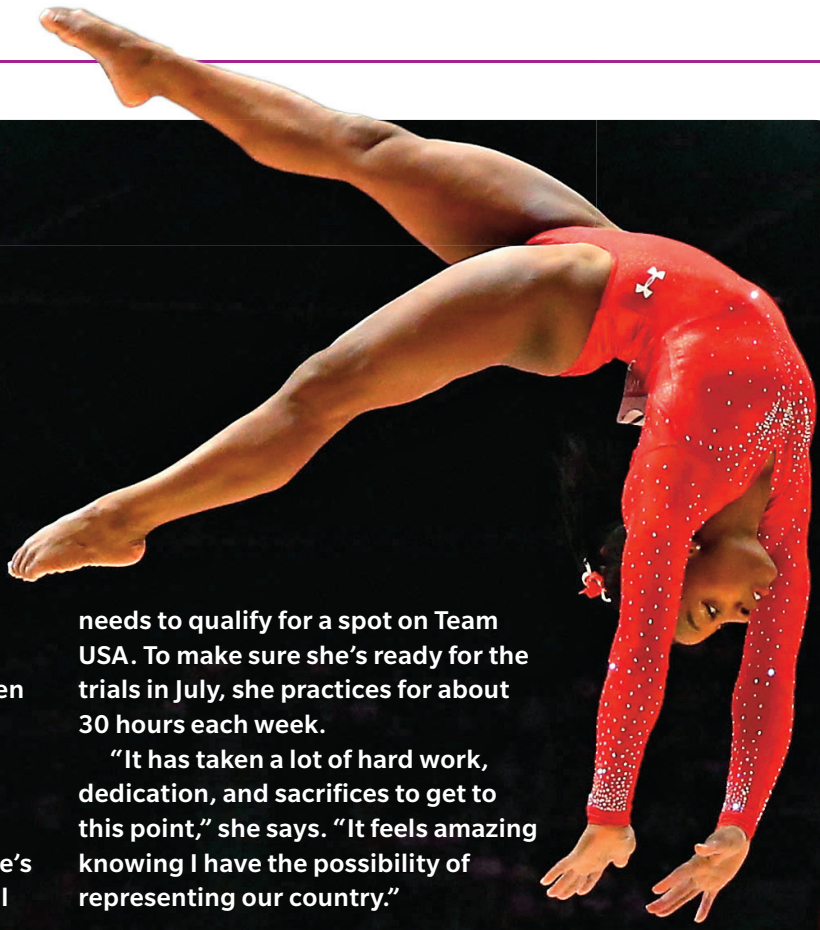
Biles was introduced to the sport while on a field trip to a local gym when she was 6 years old.

"I've been bouncing around ever since," she says.

She hopes her next leap is into her first Olympics, in Rio. Even though she's the current world champion, Biles still

needs to qualify for a spot on Team USA. To make sure she's ready for the trials in July, she practices for about 30 hours each week.

"It has taken a lot of hard work, dedication, and sacrifices to get to this point," she says. "It feels amazing knowing I have the possibility of representing our country."



ALEX LUI/SEB/GETTY IMAGES (SIMONE); DAMIAN DOVARGANES/AP PHOTO (IBTIHAJ)

## Ibtihaj Muhammad

**Sport:** Fencing

**Hometown:** Maplewood, New Jersey

The sport of fencing is similar to the sword fights you may have seen in movies. Fencers score points by using weapons to strike their opponents.

For protection, they wear masks and heavy clothing, which can make it difficult to tell one athlete from another.

When fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad (IB-tee-hahj moo-HAHM-mihd) takes off her mask, she reveals something that makes her stand out from the competition. She wears a hijab (hee-JAHB), a scarf that covers her head and neck. She is a Muslim, a follower of the religion of Islam. Like many other Muslim women, Muhammad believes in keeping her entire body covered except for her hands and face when she's in public. In Rio, she will be the first U.S. athlete ever to compete in the Olympics while wearing a hijab.

"I'm really proud of my accomplishments and also just to be a positive image for Muslim women," she says.







## Maya Moore

**Sport:** Basketball

**Hometown:** Atlanta, Georgia

Maya Moore isn't used to losing. She won two national championships while in college at the University of Connecticut. She has also been a Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) champion three times. Plus, she was a member of the U.S. team that won the gold medal at the 2012 Olympics in London, England.

The U.S. women's basketball team doesn't lose very often either. In fact, the team has won five straight Olympic gold medals. Moore realizes the pressure is on to keep that streak going in Rio.

"It's a good pressure, because we'll use it to help us stay focused," she says. "We're going to be so locked in on the moment and what we need to do to win every game."

## Yusra Mardini

**Sport:** Swimming

**Hometown:** Damascus, Syria

**Current home:** Berlin, Germany

For years, 18-year-old Yusra Mardini has trained to become a champion swimmer. Last summer, she had to swim to save her life. Yusra and her sister, Sarah, had fled their home in Syria to escape a civil war. They were crossing the Mediterranean Sea to get to Greece in a small boat packed with 18 other refugees. A few miles from shore, the motor stopped working. The boat was in danger of capsizing. Yusra, Sarah, and another woman were the only passengers who knew how to swim. They jumped into the water and pushed and pulled the boat to shore.

Yusra and Sarah now live in Germany. Yusra hopes to fulfill her Olympic dream as part of the team of Refugee Olympic Athletes (ROA). It will be the first-ever Olympic team made up of athletes who were forced to flee from their homelands. Yusra is one of 43 athletes who may earn a spot on the team. Without ROA, none of them would have the chance to compete in this year's Games.

"I want refugees to be proud of me," she told reporters in March. "I want to show everybody that it's hard to arrive at your dreams, but it's not impossible."



HARRY E. WALKER/TNS/ZUMAPRESS (MAYA); MICHAEL SOHN/AP PHOTO (YUSRA)



# Leonel "Leo" Manzano

**Sport:** Track and Field

**Hometown:** Austin, Texas

Leo Manzano already knows what it's like to win an Olympic medal. He took home the silver in the 1,500-meter race at the 2012 Olympics. When he crossed the finish line, Manzano, who was born in Mexico, was overcome with emotion.

"I threw myself on the ground and started crying," he says. "They were tears of joy!"

This summer, Manzano hopes to top his performance from four years ago.

"Winning a gold medal would be the ultimate!" he says.



## Will Rio Be Ready?

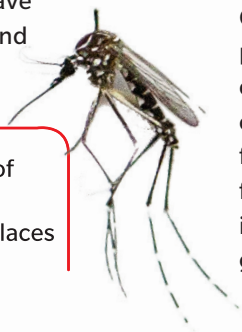
To prepare for the Olympics, Brazil has spent about \$10 billion on improvements, including new stadiums and an underground train line. Still, recent **turmoil** in Brazil has many people asking whether Rio is ready. Here are three big challenges the city (and the country) faces leading up to the Olympics.

**Health Score:** More than 1.5 million Brazilians have been infected by a virus called Zika (ZEE-kuh) since last May. The virus, which is spread by mosquitoes, usually produces mild symptoms, such as a fever and rash. But health experts have found that it can cause serious harm to babies born to women who have the virus. Health officials worry that people traveling to Brazil for the Olympics could carry the virus back to their home countries. In Rio, officials are closely inspecting Olympic **venues** for areas where mosquitoes might be breeding. Athletes will have mosquito nets in their bedrooms and be given plenty of insect repellent.

### Words to Know

**turmoil** (TUHR-moyl) *noun*. a state of great confusion or unrest

**venues** (VEHN-yooz) *noun, plural*. places where organized events take place



Rowers walk past dead fish in the lagoon where some Olympic water events will be held.

**Water Worries:** Many of the more than 6 million people in Rio live in homes that aren't connected to a modern sewer system. As a result, most of the city's raw sewage flows directly into the natural waterways. This includes the bodies of water where all the Olympic sailing, rowing, and canoeing events will be held. Athletes will take extra precautions, such as thoroughly scrubbing down their boats and washing their uniforms after each race.

**A New President?** By the time the Olympics begin, Brazil's unpopular president, Dilma Rousseff, may be out of a job. Brazilians in Rio and other cities have held huge protests to call for her impeachment, or official removal from office. Among other things, Rousseff is accused of breaking the law by misusing government money.

