

# Thousands Of Athletes Prepare For Special Olympics This Week

BY JOHN ROGERS  
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The first Special Olympics World Games drew about a thousand U.S. and Canadian competitors to Chicago for an event designed to celebrate athletes with intellectual disabilities.

“It was probably a little on the small side,” Olympic icon Rafer Johnson, who welcomed those competitors in 1968, recalled recently with a chuckle, “but it had an unbelievable amount of enthusiasm.”

Nearly a half-century later, the games will bring some 6,500 athletes from 165 countries to Los Angeles this week to take part in 25 sports at venues across the city. And Johnson, who won a gold medal in the decathlon at the 1960 Olympics, will be there to welcome them again.

Athletes ages 8 to 71 will compete in soccer, basketball, volleyball, tennis, track, roller skating and other sports over nine days. About a half-million people are expected to come watch, including Olympic gold medalist swimmer Michael Phelps and diver Greg Louganis, basketball great Yao Ming and even first lady Michelle Obama, who will open the event Saturday at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, site of the 1932 and 1984 Summer Olympics.

“It’s going to be the largest event Los

Angeles has hosted since the 1984 Summer Olympics, and the largest sports-humanitarian event in the world this year,” said Patrick McClenahan, president and chief executive of LA2015, the nonprofit bringing the games to L.A.

Musicians Stevie Wonder, Avril Lavigne and others will perform at the opening ceremonies. The event is similar to the Olympics that inspired it, but with a few tweaks.

Athletes will be placed in divisions based on age and skill level so, for example, a 10-year-old sprinter doesn’t wind up running against a 25-year-old. While the top three finishers will receive gold, silver and bronze medals, everyone will receive a participant’s ribbon and a chance to stand on the victory platform.

The games were created by President John Kennedy’s sister Eunice Kennedy Shriver as a way of allowing people with intellectual disabilities to enjoy fuller lives. After years of holding a smaller version in her backyard, she took them international in 1968.

From that humble beginning, they have become much more, says Dustin Plunkett, a LA2015 board member.

“It’s about life-saving experiences for people. It’s about learning to be the best person you can be,” says Plunkett, a former Special Olympics athlete.

“When I was a kid, I was moving pretty much home to home, family member to

family member, and nobody in my family knew how to support me because of my cleft palate and my intellectual disability,” he said in a recent interview.

Plunkett, who has a cognitive disability, recalls growing up bored and being called names until he started playing sports.

A coach got him into a Southern California Special Olympics program, and over the next 19 years, Plunkett, now 34, went from athlete to coach to Special Olympics global ambassador. This year, he designed the uniforms for 30,000 volunteers and will provide color commentary for ESPN.

He’s the perfect example of what the Special Olympics, with its credo of being the best one can be, allows a person to accomplish, says McClenahan, the LA2015 chief.

Indeed, it’s people like Plunkett, Johnson says, that keep him coming back to the Special Olympics.

Johnson, who will turn 80 next month, carried the American flag into the 1960 opening ceremonies in Rome as captain of the U.S. Olympic team and lit the flame to open the 1984 Olympics.

Those were great moments, he says, but he still gets choked up when he talks about seeing an opening ceremony for the Special Olympics World Games and the joy it brings to those who participate.

# US, Cuba Reopen Embassies, Restore Full Diplomatic Relations

BY PAUL RICHTER AND MARY ANN TOMAN-MILLER  
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WASHINGTON — The United States and Cuba quietly but officially opened embassies on each others’ territory at the stroke of midnight Monday, restoring full diplomatic relations and ending half a century of diplomatic separation between the longtime adversaries.

The State Department formally upgraded its limited diplomatic mission on the historic Malecon waterfront in Havana into a full-fledged embassy, and Cuba did the same with a stately mansion it owns in the Adams Morgan neighborhood, a center of Washington’s Latino immigrant community.

Secretary of State John F. Kerry plans to visit Cuba on Aug. 14 to raise the U.S. flag over the embassy for the first time since the Eisenhower administration severed ties with Cuba in 1961.

Shortly after 4:30 a.m., still long before sunrise, a Cuban flag was added to the standards of more than 190 other nations in the State Department’s cavernous marble lobby. A State Department video posted later shows an unidentified worker on a squeaky hydraulic lift placing the red, white and blue banner into a flag-holder next to the Croatian flag.

Bruno Rodriguez, Cuba’s foreign minister, later hoisted a Cuban flag up a gleaming white pole in front of the ornate three-story embassy and before about 500 invited guests, including several members of Congress. Moments later, a recording of the Cuban national anthem blared through loudspeakers.

Assistant Secretary of State Robert Jacobson, who led the talks to restore ties, was the highest ranking U.S. official to attend. The White House sent Benjamin J. Rhodes, a deputy national security adviser who took part in the secret diplomacy that led to the opening.

Onlookers and protesters lined both sides of the busy street, chanting pro- and anti-Castro slogans. The protests were peaceful on a sweltering, steamy morning.

Speaking to the crowd, Rodriguez mixed Cuban revolutionary doctrine with thanks to President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro for restoring diplomatic ties after decades of official hostility. He said reopening embassies will “pave the way to the complex and certainly long process toward the normalization of bilateral relations.”

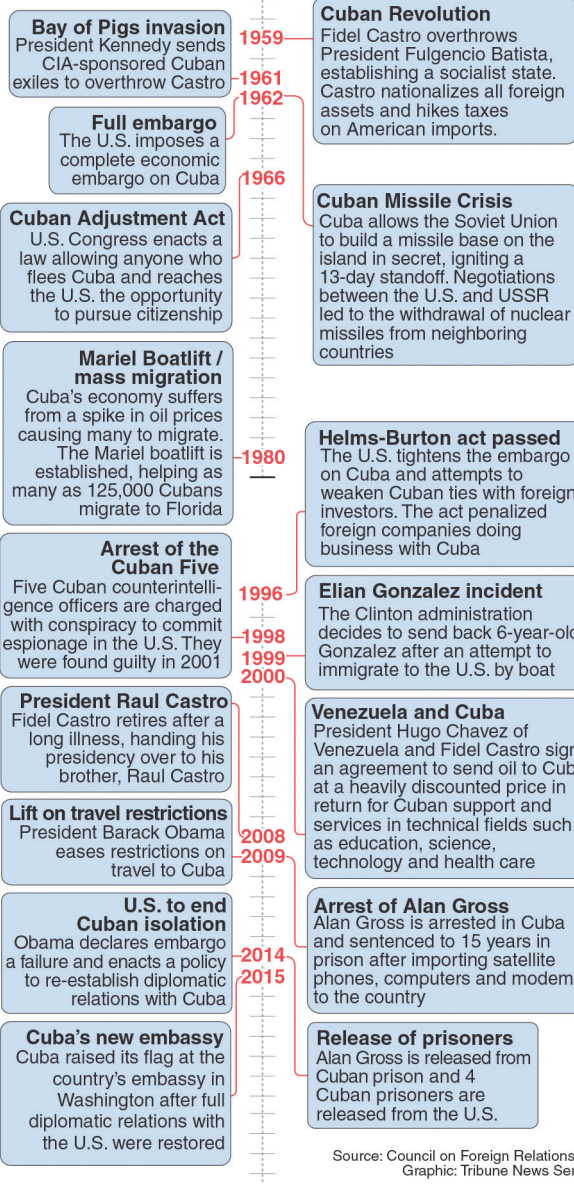
But Rodriguez said only the lifting of the decades-old U.S. trade embargo, return of the U.S. Navy base on Guantanamo Bay and “respect for Cuba’s sovereignty will lend some meaning to the historic event that we are witnessing today.”

U.S. officials who attended obviously supported the opening. Harsh critics in Congress stayed away.

“It’s a great first step ... but it took 55 years getting here,” said Rep. Dan Beyer,

## U.S.-Cuba timeline

The Cuban flag was added to the lobby of the State Department after relations with America were fully restored.



D-Va., after the ceremony. “It won’t be solved in 55 days.”

“It’s never just symbolic when two countries establish diplomatic relations,” said Jose E. Serrano, D-N.Y. “It was a very emotional moment with lots of tears when Bruno said ‘Welcome.’”

In a statement, Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., a Cuban-American who opposes the opening, said diplomatic relations with Washington “are a privilege and must be earned, yet the Cuban government refuses to make any substantial changes

to uphold democratic principles and human rights.”

Appearing later at the State Department with Rodriguez, Kerry hailed the thaw in long frozen relations “as a time to start repairing what has been broken, and opening what for too long has been closed.”

Kerry acknowledged that the effort to normalize relations would be “long and complex. Along the way, there are sure to be bumps in the road and moments of frustration. Patience will be required.”

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## Greeks Wake Up To Economic Changes

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — Greek banks reopened Monday for the first time in three weeks, but strict limits on cash withdrawals and higher taxes on everything from coffee to diapers meant the economic outlook for the recession-battered country was far from back to normal.

There were hopeful developments: The cash-strapped nation got a short-term loan from European creditors to pay more than 6 billion euros (\$6.5 billion) owed to the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank. Non-payment of either would have derailed Greece’s latest bailout request.

But for most Greeks, already buffeted by six years of recession, Monday was all about rising prices as tax hikes demanded by creditors took effect.

Dimitris Chronis, who has run a small kebab shop in central Athens for 20 years, said the higher tax rates could push his business over the edge.

“I can’t put up my prices because I’ll have no customers at all,” lamented Chronis, who said sales have already slid by around 80 percent since banking restrictions were imposed on June 29.

## Details Tenn. Shooting Emerge

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (AP) — Bits and pieces have emerged over the past few days about Muhammad Youssef Abdulazez’s troubled life. But two significant pieces of the puzzle are missing: Why did he ambush two military sites, killing four Marines and a sailor? And was he propelled to do so by his own demons or at the direction of someone else?

Until last Thursday’s shooting, the Kuwait-born 24-year-old was not on the radar of terrorism investigators. As a result, a portrait of his background, contacts, computer use and travels must be assembled from the ground up and pieced together.

He blended into everyday life in Chattanooga as a clean-cut high school wrestler who graduated from college with an engineering degree and regularly attended a local mosque.

But he also had a more turbulent side, as evidenced by his arrest for drunken driving after returning from Jordan. He was set to face a judge later this month.

Abdulazez was killed in a shootout with police at a Marine-Navy facility where the slain servicemen were killed. Authorities said Abdulazez was driving a rented silver Mustang convertible, wore a vest with extra ammunition and wielded at least two long guns — either rifles or shotguns — and a handgun.

## Security Council Endorses Nuclear Deal

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The U.N. Security Council on Monday unanimously endorsed the landmark deal to rein in Iran’s nuclear program and authorized measures leading to the end of U.N. sanctions, but also approved a provision that would automatically reinstate the harsh measures if Tehran reneges on its promises.

European Union foreign ministers meeting in Brussels immediately followed suit, endorsing the agreement between Iran and six major powers and taking the first step to lift EU sanctions.

President Barack Obama told reporters he hopes the Republican-controlled U.S. Congress, where there is strong opposition to the deal, will pay attention to the “broad international consensus,” stressing that the deal is “by far our strongest approach to ensuring that Iran does not get a nuclear weapon.”

But House Speaker John Boehner accused Obama of “ignoring the concerns of the American people” by allowing “such a consequential vote” to go ahead in the U.N. just 24 hours after submitting the agreement to Congress, which has 60 days to consider it. “This is a bad start for a bad deal,” he said.

While sharp differences remain between the United States and Iran, ambassadors from both countries called the agreement an important achievement for diplomacy.

## Lawyers Use Cosby’s Words Against Him

Bill Cosby’s lurid, decade-old testimony about his philandering could do more than damage what’s left of his fatherly image — it could very well be used against him in court by some of the women who accuse him of sexual assault.

Rocco Cipparone, a defense lawyer in New Jersey who is not connected to any of the legal action surrounding Cosby, said Monday that what the comedian said under oath could wind up hurting him in civil or criminal cases if judges can be persuaded to rule the testimony admissible.

For Cosby to avoid being damaged by his own words, Cipparone said, “you’d have to navigate a virtual minefield.”

Dozens of women have accused Cosby of drugging and sexually assaulting them over four decades, though few of the accusations have begun to play out in court, largely because the statute of limitations for criminal charges has run out in most instances.

## Bridge In Calif. Failed Flash Flood Test

DESERT CENTER, Calif. (AP) — The interstate bridge that washed out in the desert between Los Angeles and Phoenix easily withstood its daily load of thousands of cars and trucks, but the pounding of a powerful flash flood scoured away the land where the bridge was anchored, officials said Monday.

The flood severed a highway vital to the movement of people and commerce between two of the nation’s largest cities. On an average day, the interstate carries about 27,000 vehicles in either direction.

Water rushing through a normally dry desert gully eroded the land around the Interstate 10 bridge, causing one side of the eastbound span to collapse and forcing the indefinite closure of the westbound span.

While the bridge should have been fine if the flood came straight down the gully, this time it swept down at an angle that pushed the water to one side, digging away the soil at the gully’s edge where the bridge reconnected with the road bed, according to California Department of Transportation spokeswoman Vanessa Wiseman.

Caltrans was not yet sure why the flow was redirected, but such changes are not unusual in sandy desert soil, she said.

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