

Sport Climbing

Hello everyone! My name is Stephen Cannell, coordinator for international relations (CIR) in Toyohashi. Today I would like to introduce you all to a sport making its Olympic debut in Tokyo next year, sport climbing.



Sport climbing is an event in which athletes compete on a man-made climbing wall, made to emulate a rock face. The Olympics will feature a combined event, made up of 3 disciplines: lead, bouldering, and speed.

When you picture rock climbing, the image that likely comes to mind is lead climbing. A rope is secured by a partner, or belayer, and the climber places the rope in clips as they climb. The Olympic iteration of lead climbing will be a 6 minute climb in which athletes compete to see who can climb to the highest point on the wall. If two or more athletes reach the same point, or complete the wall, then the one to do it the fastest is declared the winner.

Bouldering is a climbing discipline in which no ropes or partners are used, and it usually takes place on relatively low rocks. These rocks also tend to have a more severe slant than a wall used in lead climbing. In recent years, indoor bouldering gyms have been popping up rapidly, and the sport has quickly become very popular. The Olympic iteration will feature a 4 minute period in which athletes compete to see how many times they can climb the wall.

Speed climbing is a full-on race. In contrast to lead climbing, the rope is pre-set at the top of the wall, which is referred to as a top-rope. The course used in speed climbing is always the same and is used in most international competitions. Top male climbers climb the 15m wall in 5-7 seconds, and female climbers in 7-8 seconds. Speed climbing is considered a separate skill from other types of climbing, and many athletes focus exclusively on speed climbing. However, the Tokyo 2020 Olympics will be a combined event, meaning that athletes will have to excel in all 3 disciplines to take home gold. Final placements will be determined by multiplying the athlete's placements in each individual event together. Because of this, an

athlete could place 1st in bouldering, 1st in lead, and 10th in speed (for a total of 10), and they would lose to an athlete who placed 2nd in all three events (for a total of 8.) This means that athletes cannot afford to focus on only one event, and all the competitors will likely be training hard for all 3 disciplines.

While competitive sport climbing takes place on man-made walls, the physical requirements for being a strong climber do not differ very much from those required in outdoor rock climbing. From lifting their entire body weight using only their fingertips, to hanging from slippery holds and turning themselves upside down to reach a far hold with their feet, these athletes are amazing. Power, balance, flexibility, all aspects of physical ability are tested. Many of the strongest competitive sport climbers honed their skills on natural rock walls.

Currently, 32 of the 40 positions for sport climbing at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics have been filled. Japan, America, France have all qualified the maximum 4 athletes. For Japan, Tomoa Narasaki, Kai Harada, Akiyo Noguchi, and Miho Nonaka are all extremely strong climbers. Alex Megos, from Toyohashi's Host Town partner Germany, is considered one of the best climbers, and has qualified alongside Jan Hojer. France's Adam Ondra, known by many as the best rock climber on Earth, has also secured a qualification.

Rock climbing, which has experienced a boom in popularity in recent years, will only become more popular after being featured at the Olympics. Japan and Germany will both be battling for gold in Tokyo, so be sure to cheer on all the athletes!