mystery science

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “Who is the youngest Olympian ever?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

VIDEO 1

Hey, it's Jay. When I was a kid, I dreamed about competing in the Olympics. Every few years, the best athletes from around the world gather together in one city to compete in sports at the highest level. These are called the Olympic and Paralympic Games. The Olympics are a competition for elite athletes, and the Paralympics are specifically for elite athletes who have disabilities. I wanted to be an Olympian so badly. Someone named Harry has a question about the Olympics, too. Let's give Harry a call now.

[Video Call]

- Hi, Jay.
- Hi, Harry.
- I have a question for you. Who is the youngest Olympian ever?
- That's a great question.

It would be awesome to be an Olympian. You'd get to travel to an international destination, meet sports champions from around the world, and maybe even take home an Olympic medal. But kids can't be Olympians, right? Well, not so fast. It's true, most competitors at the Olympic and Paralympic Games are adults. But there have been kids and teens who have become Olympians or Paralympians and accomplished some pretty impressive things. Let's take a look. This is Tara Lapinski. When she went to compete in the Olympics in the year 1998, Tara was too

young to even get a driver's license. But she still won a gold medal in figure skating at only fifteen years old. And she's not even the youngest competitor out there. Snowboarder Ben Tudhope first competed in the Paralympics when he was only fourteen, and he took home a bronze medal. But he was still a year older than Yun-Mi Kim. She's a speed skater. She won a gold medal at the Olympics at thirteen years old, before she was old enough to even go to high school. And check out Kokona Hiraki. Kokona is a skateboarder. She took home a silver medal at the Olympics in 2020 at only twelve years old. Surely, she's the youngest, right? Nope. Meet Natalia Partyka. She's a competitor in table tennis. When she competed in the Paralympics for the first time, she was only eleven years old. She's now competed in both the Olympics and Paralympics and won six Paralympic gold medals. Eleven years old. That's got to be the youngest Olympian or Paralympian ever, right? I wonder what you think. Could there be an Olympian or Paralympian younger than eleven years old? Why or why not?

VIDEO 2

At eleven years old, Natalia Partyka became the youngest Paralympian in history. But even she is not the youngest Olympian ever. That honor goes to this guy. Wait, hang on. Isn't that an adult? It is. Dimitrios Loundras was a gymnast at the 1896 Olympics, more than one hundred years ago. Dimitrios competed so long ago that pictures of him are really hard to find. We think this is a picture of him as an adult, but we're not totally sure. When Dimitrios competed in the Olympics, he was a kid—only ten years old, young enough to be in fourth grade—and his team won a bronze medal. So Dimitrios was the youngest Olympian ever…maybe. Check this out. Historians studying the Olympics have discovered this picture from the 1900 Olympic Games. It's blurry and hard to see, but this is a picture of three teammates on the Dutch Olympic rowing team. That's right, three. That kid in the center was an Olympian. But here's the thing. It's been

so long since this picture was taken that nobody knows who this kid was or how old he was when he competed. Historians don't know for sure, but some think this kid may have been as young as seven. Seven years old and competing at the Olympics against athletes four times his age, in front of the entire world. If that sounds pretty scary to you, you're not alone. Kids have some unique advantages as Olympians. Compared with most adult athletes, kids are smaller, lighter, and sometimes speedier. In some cases, that can give kid Olympians a winning edge. But being an Olympian or Paralympian is also a lot of pressure. A huge competition like that requires so much from both your body and your mind. Olympic and Paralympic athletes have to spend hours and hours every day doing intense training. That training can be more intense than young growing bodies can handle safely. And it can take time away from other important things kids do, like school or making friends. Over the years, many people have started thinking about how to help young athletes be their best without pressuring them to do anything that's not healthy for their bodies or their minds. Some sports even have specific rules about how old you have to be before you can compete in the Olympics or Paralympics. And young Olympic hopefuls now have their very own competition, the Youth Olympic Games, which is a sports competition specifically for elite athletes ages fifteen to seventeen.

So, in summary, a lot of really young athletes have accomplished some incredible things in the Olympics and Paralympics. From ice skaters to snowboarders to skateboarders to gymnasts to mystery rowers and more. As of 2026, the youngest Paralympian ever is table tennis champion Natalia Partyka. And we think the youngest Olympian ever was gymnast Dimitrios Londras when he was only ten years old. But there might have been competitors even younger. Super young athletes face a lot of intense pressure, and not every kid wants that yet. So whether you're dreaming of competing in the Olympics someday or just enjoying watching, you have a lot to look forward to. That's all for this week's question. Thanks for asking, Harry.