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Olympic medals made with Eiffel Tower pieces

Iron cut from parts of landmark swapped out during renovations

John Leicester

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PARIS – An Olympic medal inlaid with a piece of the Eiffel Tower. How's that for a monumental prize?

A hexagonal, polished chunk of iron taken from the iconic landmark is being embedded in each gold, silver and bronze medal that will be hung around athletes' necks at the July 26-Aug. 11 Paris Games and Paralympics that follow.

Games organizers revealed their revolutionary design on Thursday.

Simone Biles has seven medals from her two previous Olympics and LeBron James has two golds and one bronze from London, Beijing and Athens. But neither of those athletes who are targeting the Paris Games nor any of the roughly 36,600 other medalists at 29 previous Summer Olympics stretching back to 1896 ever owned one quite like these.

By making history at the Games, Paris medalists will take a bit of France and its history home, too.

Here's a deep dive into the medals that are sure to wow:

Are these really made with Eiffel Tower chunks?

Absolutely. The 1,083-foot-tall tower is made of 18,038 iron parts. But it's also getting a bit long in the tooth. Built for the 1889 World's Fair – which celebrated the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution – engineer Gustave Eiffel's tower was only intended to stand for 20 years.

Instead, it just goes on and on – thanks to a bit of rejuvenating surgery from time to time and constant care.

The iron pieces embedded in the center of the Olympic medals each weigh about two-thirds of an ounce.

They were cut from girders and other bits that were swapped out of the Eiffel Tower during renovations and

stored for safekeeping, according to Joachim Roncin, head of design at the Paris Games organizing committee. “The concept came after a few discussions. We realized that there’s one symbol known across the world, which is the Eiffel Tower,” Roncin said.

“We said to ourselves, ‘Hey, what if we approached the Eiffel Tower Operating Co. to see if it’s possible to get a bit of the Eiffel Tower to integrate into the medal?’”

How were the chunks prepared?

They were stripped of paint, polished and varnished for their second life.

They are stamped with “Paris 2024” and the Games logo – which looks like a flame or the face of a woman with a chic bob haircut. The five Olympic rings are also stamped on the iron of the Olympic

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medals. The Paralympic logo of three swooshes, known as the Agitos, is stamped on the medals for the Aug. 28-Sept. 8 Paralympics.

The iron pieces’ hexagonal form represents France. The French sometimes refer to their country as “L’Hexagone” – the hexagon – because of its shape.

Paris jewelry house Chaumet designed the medals. Six small clasps that hold the iron pieces in the medals are a wink at the 2.5 million rivets that bind the Eiffel Tower together.

Around the pieces are disks of gold, silver or bronze. Organizers say the metal is all recycled, not newly mined.

Are Paris’ medals unique?

Yes. Olympic medals have tended to be quite sober. In what was a first, medals for the 2008 Beijing Olympics contained inlaid jade disks. But Paris is the only host city to include chunks of a famous monument.

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The ancient Greek goddess of victory, Nike, features on the Olympic medals' other side – as she has done at every Games since 1928. But Paris has also added a small representation of the Eiffel Tower on that side, in another break with tradition.

The other side of the Paralympic medals shows a view of the tower as if looking upward from underneath. For people with visual impairments, “Paris 2024” is written in Braille and the edges have notches: one for gold, two for silver, three for bronze.

The Paris Mint is manufacturing 5,084 medals – about 2,600 for the Olympics and 2,400 for the Paralympics. That is likely more than will be required. Some will be stored in case medals need to be reassigned after the Games, which can happen when medal-winner winners are subsequently stripped of the prizes for doping. Some go to museums. Any other spares could be destroyed.

They'll come in a dark-blue box from Chaumet and a certificate from the Eiffel Tower Operating Co. that the iron pieces came from the monument.

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