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## The Largest Parapan American Games In History Kicks Off With Opening Ceremony

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With an electric opening ceremony that celebrated both the spirit and evolution of the Paralympic Movement, the Parapan American Games Lima 2019 officially began on Friday, August 23 at the Estadio Nacional in Lima, Peru.

The 2019 edition of the Parapan American Games is the largest in history, showcasing 17 sports and over 1,890 athletes from 33 nations in the Americas region.

“Change doesn’t happen overnight; these Games are no magic wand,” said Carlos Neuhaus, president of the Lima 2019 Organizing Committee. “But my hope is that Lima 2019 will be the spark that lights the fuse and ignites a long overdue process of building greater awareness, understanding and integration of people with a disability in our society, and across the Americas.”

The theme of the opening ceremony was “elevation”, portraying a story of two children who embark on a journey full of challenges and obstacles, but are able to overcome them and reach greater heights through their friendship and resilience.

Each country’s delegation entered the stadium, where they were met by cheers from the audience. The 257 members of Team USA were greeted warmly as they walked in, led by three-time Paralympian Katie Holloway of the U.S. women’s sitting volleyball team. Holloway was selected by her fellow athletes for the honor of the flag bearer at this year’s opening ceremony.

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"I just feel really honored that the U.S. delegation of athletes saw me as a person that would be representative of them," Holloway said. "To hold the flag, with honor, for our whole entire U.S. Paralympic delegation, is really special."

The Parapan American Flame was carried into the stadium by multiple athletes before reaching the top of a totem surrounded by dancers and acrobats. It was initially lit on August 20 in Pachamac, the largest archaeological complex in Lima, and was then carried to other locations throughout the city before making its way to the Estadio Nacional for the duration of the Games.

To close out the show, the Peruvian band Bareto provided an upbeat mix of rock, reggae, psychedelic and tropical music to the audience. The group's cumbia song "Cariñito" has become the unofficial anthem of Lima 2019 as it has been the Peruvian team's entrance song, and been played at all sports venues and volunteer rehearsals.

Two sports, table tennis and wheelchair rugby, began competition prior to the opening ceremony, with the former hosting matches as early as August 22.

For the rest of the athletes; however, the opening ceremony signaled the beginning of a tremendous event with plenty of opportunities to shine on the international stage over the next nine days.

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