

THE SPORT OF THE SKIES

By Lexi Baldino



What competitive sport tests accuracy more than speed, is dependent on the wind, and had 64 competitors participate in 18 events of the 1900 Olympic Games?

If you guessed hot air ballooning, you win a brand new... great job!

In 1783 a Parisian scientist launched the first ever hot air balloon carrying three passengers – a sheep, a duck and a rooster. Their flight lasted a whopping 15 minutes.

Two months later, the first manned attempt boasted a 20-minute fly period, launching the beginning of this celebrated activity. In present times you may catch a hot air balloon, or many, soaring the skies on any given day – including the Sullair balloon – so let's learn more about this adventurous sport.

We're all taught "warm air rises," and this concept is no different in Hot Air Ballooning. The balloon rises as warm air becomes trapped inside the "envelope" where it is less

dense than the air outside. The cooling air is continuously replenished with heat from the flames of a propane burner allowing the balloon to continue to rise. When it's time to gently descend back to the ground, this heat is tapered off.

What makes hot air ballooning so unique is the lack of control. A balloon cannot be steered. It travels with the wind, but a skilled pilot can maneuver it just by understanding wind directions at varying altitudes. One reason most flights take place in the early mornings and evenings is because the atmospheric conditions are more stable and therefore easier to navigate.

Today, competitive flying is an in demand and highly competitive sport. Competitions take place around the world over several days and consist of a series of selected tasks. These tasks require maneuvering the balloons over a course that may include hovering over clearly positioned goals such as road intersections, dropping a weighted marker bag as close to a target as possible, and time and distance competitions as recorded by GPS. A single flight usually involves multiple tasks, so strategy is required by pilots to maximize their points. Pilots apply their skills and judgement in flight planning, anticipation and managing various weather conditions.

The Sullair balloon is a ZL-65 model that reaches six stories high and weighs 210 pounds, with a volume of 65,000 cubic feet. Piloting this mega balloon for the past eight years is Shawn Raya. Shawn is an FAA licensed pilot who has logged over 2,183 hours as Pilot in Command over last 34 years. Taught and inspired by his father,

Shawn received his student pilot's license at the young age of 14, private license at age 16, and commercial pilot license at 18. Over the years, Shawn has taken over five thousand passengers on scenic exploits and competed across the world, securing the title of Champion in several competitions. Shawn is currently ranked 2nd out of the top 50 pilots who have qualified for the upcoming 2021 US Nationals competition held by the Balloon Federation of America.

With the help of his crew, his wife and four kids, Shawn travels the globe participating in competitions and lighting the night with Hot Air Balloon Glows, bringing joy to adults and kids alike. It is an honor to have pilot Shawn Raya and crew representing Sullair in the skies.

Check out this video to learn more about Shawn and the Sullair balloon. To find out where you can catch the Sullair balloon next, visit sullair.com/balloon.

SOURCES:

<https://www.nationalballoonmuseum.com/about/history-of-ballooning/>

<https://balloonfiesta.com/Hot-Air-History>

<https://www.hotairballoons2020.com/en/informations/about-competitive-flying/>

<https://www.fai.org/page/cia-hot-air-balloons>