My name is Peixin Gao, and I am a PhD student in Professor Ben Shneiderman’s Information Visualization class at University of Maryland. I am writing to you in regards to the visualization design of the 2012 London Olympic game results. The URL of the webpage is http://london2012.nytimes.com/results.

I feel that the design of the visualization is very eye-catching and interesting. It helps me catch a lot of information fast and efficiently. First of all, it contains a lot of information. Not only the medal counts in 2012 London Olympic games, but also the information of all past Olympic games since 1896 is illustrated in the graph, which is very impressive. I can get a basic understanding about the situations of different countries in Olympic games along the history within several glimpses. For example, I can figure out that the number of countries with medals in the game is greater and greater as time goes on. Second, it arranges countries according to their geographic locations, which I think is a very smart design. This arrangement makes use of the readers’ geographic knowledge, and help readers locate the countries that they care about in around constant time (as long as they know the continents that the countries belong to), which is really a big advantage, compared to those designs which may take a linear time to do so. Third, the coloring makes it easier to distinguish among different continents. Besides, using a circle of which the size is proportional to the number of medals it wined is intuitive and convenient for users to figure out the rank. Apart from that, when I click one country under a single Olympic game, I notice that the medals that it wined in that year will be highlighted below, and I feel it is pretty cool.

Meanwhile, I also feel that there may still be some places that can be improved to make the visualization more informative and easier to use. My suggestions are as follows.

First is about the operation feedback, I feel that the response should be more substantial. In the design, when the cursor is on a certain country, there will be a black loop around the corresponding circle with a medal count of the country aside. I feel that the black loop may not be clear enough for user to recognize sometimes, especially when it’s a country of a small circle. My suggestion would be use the extraction of flag information (including color and pattern) to denote the selected country. For example, when France is selected, the circle will turn from green to a triple stripe of blue, white and red.

Meanwhile, I feel that it may be better if there is such option to focus on one single nation’s medal winning tendency along time axis. For example, apart from being curious about the comparison of all countries in a single year, I would also like to know the medal winning
tendency of a certain country, for instance USA.

Also, I think it would be better if the function of comparison between two countries or more than two countries can be enabled in this visualization. It would provide more information, and help readers who are curious about this to get the information much faster.

My last suggestion would be expressing the ration of gold, silver and bronze medals in pies (or bars), because I guess that will reflect the information directly.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss my suggestions further. And I am looking forward to here from you at your convenience.

Sincerely yours,
Peixin Gao