

Origins of the Olympic Games

For 1,000 years from 776BC to 395AD, citizens from around the Greek Empire flocked to Olympia every four years to take part in Games honouring the god Zeus. While the ultimate prize was the olive wreath of victory, the Olympic values – noble competition and the effort to combine body, will and mind in a balanced whole – gave special meaning to the Games

RUNNING

Stadion: Only event of first 13 Olympiads. One length of stadium – 192m. Olympiad named after winner

Diaulos: Two lengths of stadium

Dolichos: Long-distance race – anything from 7-24 lengths

Hoplitodromia: Endurance race wearing shield, helmet, and **greaves** – lower leg armour

PENTATHLON

Test for all-round athlete comprising five events; discus, javelin, long jump, running and wrestling

DISCUS THROW

Technique very similar to today

Discus: Made originally of stone, later of iron, lead or bronze
Diameter: 17-32cm
Weight: 1.3-6.6kg

JAVELIN THROW

Leather thong looped around javelin enabled greater force of throw and rotation for steadier, longer flight

LONG JUMP

Hand-held weights – **halteres** – gave jumper momentum on take-off and balance on landing

Stadium
Track: 192m
Capacity: 40-45,000

Different shapes, made of lead, iron or stone.
Weight: c2.5kg
Length: 12-23cm

Hippodrome
Equestrian events
Track: 600m

Temple of Zeus
Housed gold and ivory statue of Zeus, one of Seven Wonders of Ancient World

Gymnasium
Running, discus, javelin

Prytaneion
Hosted banquet for victors

Temple of Hera

Echo Colonnade
Trumpeters sounded start of events

Bouleuterion
Olympic council meetings

Palaistra
Pancration, boxing, wrestling, long jump

Swimming pool
For relaxation only

Leonidaion
Hotel for visiting officials

COMBAT

Wrestling: Upright – to win, contestant had to throw opponent three times to ground
Ground – match continued until one competitor raised hand to acknowledge defeat

Pancration: Combined wrestling and boxing. All blows, kicking, strangling allowed, no biting or gouging of eyes

Boxing: Use of fists only. Win by fall or submission. Early boxers wrapped soft ox-hide straps – **himantes** – around hands to strengthen wrists and steady fingers

Oxeis himantes: Gloves of hard leather straps and inner layer of wool used from 4th century BC

EQUESTRIAN

Separate races for fully grown horses, mares, and foals

Chariot races
Synoris – two-horse team
Tethrippon – four-horse team. Both divided into two contests; one for horses of any age, the other for colts. Races from 4-13km