

## A bird eye view of ancient Olympic Games

<sup>1</sup> Vaidyanatha U, <sup>2</sup> Sathyanarayana K

<sup>1</sup> Research scholar, University College of Physical Education Bangalore University Bangalore, Karnataka, India

<sup>2</sup> Basketball Coach, University College of Physical Education, Bangalore University Bangalore, Karnataka, India

### Abstract

Aristotle describes a young man's ultimate physical beauty: "a body capable of enduring all efforts, either of the racecourse or of bodily strength...This is why the athletes in the pentathlon are most beautiful." (Aristotle, Rhetoric 1361b)

According to historical records, the first ancient Olympic Games can be traced back to 776 BC. They were dedicated to the Olympian gods and were staged on the ancient plains of Olympia. They continued for nearly 12 centuries, until Emperor Theodosius decreed in 393 A.D. that all such "pagan cults" (indelicate Aradhana) be banned.

**Keywords:** bird eye, Olympic Games

### 1. Introduction

Olympia, the site of the ancient Olympic Games, is in the western part of the Peloponnese which, according to Greek mythology, is the island of "Pelops", the founder of the Olympic Games. Imposing temples, votive buildings, elaborate shrines and ancient sporting facilities were combined in a site of unique natural and mystical beauty. Olympia functioned as a meeting place for worship and other religious and political practices as early as the 10th century B.C. The central part of Olympia was dominated by the majestic temple of Zeus, with the temple of Hera parallel to it.



**Fig 1:** The stadium entrance at Olympia

### 2. The Games and religion

The Olympic Games were closely linked to the religious festivals of the cult of Zeus, but were not an integral part of a rite.

Indeed, they had a secular character and aimed to show the physical qualities and evolution of the performances accomplished by young people, as well as encouraging good relations between the cities of Greece. According to specialists, "The Olympic Games owed their purity and importance to religion."

There are two stories relating to the question of ancient Olympic Games.

One story states that it was a runner from Megara, Orsippos or Orrhippos who, in 720 B.C. was the first to run naked in the stadion race. (Stadion or stade (Ancient Greek: word) was an ancient running event, part of the Games. The stadion was named after the building in which it took place, also called the stadion. This word became stadium in Latin, which became the English word stadium. There were other types of running events, but the stadion was the most prestigious; the winner was often considered to be the winner of an entire Games. Though it is a separate event, the stadion was also part of the ancient Pentathlon) when he lost his shorts in the race.

Another tradition is that it was the Spartans who introduced nudity to the Olympic Games in the 8th century B.C. as it was a Spartan tradition. It is not clear if the very first recorded victor at Olympia, Koroibos, won the stadion race in 776 B.C. wore shorts or not. It seems fairly clear that by the late 8th century nudity was common for the male contestants.

There was no torch relay in the ancient Olympic Games. There were known, however, torch relays in other ancient Greek athletic festivals including those held at Athens.

The ancient Olympics were rather different from the modern Games. There were fewer events, and only free men who spoke Greek could compete, instead of athletes from any country. And also, the games were always held at Olympia instead of moving around to different sites every time.

### 3. The events are as follows

#### Boxing

Ancient boxing had fewer rules than the modern sport. Boxers fought without rounds until one man was knocked out, or admitted he had been beaten. Unlike the modern sport, there was no rule against hitting an opponent when he was down. Instead of gloves, ancient boxers wrapped

leather thongs (himantes) around their hands and wrists which left their fingers free. There were no weight classes within the men's' and boys' divisions; opponents for a match were chosen randomly.

### **Equestrian events**

#### **Chariot racing**

There were both 2-horse chariot and 4-horse chariot races,

#### **Riding**

The course was 6 laps around the track (4.5 miles), and there were separate races for full-grown horses and foals. Jockeys rode without stirrups.

#### **Pankration**

This event was a nasty (Gruelling) combination of boxing and wrestling. Punches were allowed, although the fighters did not wrap their hands with the boxing himantes. Rules outlawed only biting and gouging an opponent's eyes, nose, or mouth with fingernails. Attacks such as kicking an opponent in the belly, which are against the rules in modern sports, were perfectly legal. Like boxing and wrestling, among others, this event had separate divisions for both men and boys.

#### **Pentathlon**

This was a 5-event combination of Discus, Javelin, Jumping, Running and Wrestling.

#### **Discus**

The ancient Greeks considered the rhythm and precision of an athlete throwing the discus as important as his strength. The discus was made of stone, iron, bronze, or lead, and was shaped like a flying saucer. Sizes varied, since the boys' division was not expected to throw the same weight as the men's'.

#### **Javelin**

The javelin was a man-high length of wood, with either a sharpened end or an attached metal point. It had a thong for a hurler's fingers attached to its centre of gravity, which increased the precision and distance of a javelin's flight.

#### **Jumps**

Athletes used lead or stone jump weights (halters) shaped like telephone receivers to increase the length of their jump. The halters were held in front of the athlete during his ascent, and forcibly thrust behind his back and dropped during his descent to help propel his body further. Jump weights also doubled as weight lifting equipment during training.

#### **Running**

There were 4 types of races at Olympia. The stadion was the oldest event of the Games.

Runners sprinted for 1 stade (192 m.), or the length of the stadium. The other races were a 2-stade race (384 m.) and a long-distance run which ranged from 7 to 24 stade (1,344 m. to 4,608 m.). And if these races weren't

enough, the Greeks had one particularly exhausting event which we lack. There was also a 2 to 4-stade (384 m. to 768 m.) race by athletes in armour. This race was especially useful in building the speed and stamina that Greek men needed during their military service. If we remember that the standard hoplite armour (helmet, shield, and greaves) weighed about 50-60 lbs, it is easy to imagine what such an event must have been like.

#### **Wrestling**

Like the modern sport, an athlete needed to throw his opponent on the ground, landing on a hip, shoulder, or back for a fair fall. 3 throws were necessary to win a match. Biting was not allowed, and genital holds were also illegal. Attacks such as breaking your opponent's fingers were permitted.

### **4. Ancient Olympic Games Events**

In the entire history of the ancient Olympic Games, almost 1200 years, there were only 23 events contested. They were divided into men's track and field events, equestrian events and boy's events. The events were divided into the following categories.

Men's track and field (8 events),

Boy's track and field (5 events)

Equestrian events for full grown horses (3 events)

Equestrian events for mules and mares (2 events)

Equestrian events for young male horses (3 events)

Specialty events (heralds and trumpeters) (2 events)

Additional athletic events were gradually added until, by the 5th century BC, the religious festival consisted of a five-day program.

Victory Ceremonies

### **5. Conclusion**

The Olympic victor received his first awards immediately after the competition. Following the announcement of the winner's name by the herald, a Hellanodikis (Greek judge) would place a palm branch in his hands, while the spectators cheered and threw flowers to him. Red ribbons were tied on his head and hands as a mark of victory.

The official award ceremony would take place on the last day of the Games, at the elevated vestibule of the temple of Zeus. In a loud voice, the herald would announce the name of the Olympic winner, his father's name, and his homeland. Then, the Hellanodikis placed the sacred olive tree wreath, or kotinos, on the winner's head.

Married women were not allowed to participate in, or to watch, the ancient Olympic Games. However, unmarried women could attend the competition, and the priestess of Demeter, goddess of fertility, was given a privileged position next to the Stadium altar.

### **6. References**

1. [www.olympic.org/ancient-olympic-games](http://www.olympic.org/ancient-olympic-games)
2. [www.penn.museum/sites](http://www.penn.museum/sites)
3. [www.wordnik.com](http://www.wordnik.com)
4. [www.perseus.tufts.edu/Olympics](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/Olympics)