

A close-up photograph of a marble bust of a woman's head, likely from the classical period. The sculpture is light-colored and shows detailed features like the eyes, nose, and lips. The background is slightly blurred, showing other parts of the bust.

The Ancient Olympic Games

776 BCE - 394 CE

Study*ladder*

The Ancient Olympic Games

The first Olympic Games took place in the Peloponnese region of Greece in 776 BCE.

They were part of a religious festival that took place every four years in a place called Olympia.



776 BCE - 728 BCE

For the first twelve festivals at Olympia, there was only one athletic event - the stadion race.

A stade was a measurement of distance, about 180 m (600 ft).

Imagine people lining the track to watch the running race! The gentle slopes on either side of the track would have given the spectators a great view of the track below.

It would have been a great honor to win the race at the Festival of Zeus!



This is the stadion track at Olympia, where the stadion race took place.



In 776 BCE, Koroibos (Coroebus), a cook from Elis, won the stadion race.

The Naked Games

Some accounts say that a runner named Orsippus (or Orhippus) from the city of Megara ran the stade race without a loincloth, possibly during the fifteenth Olympiad in 720 BCE. It may have fallen off mid-race, or perhaps he did it on purpose, thinking he would be faster without it!

Other accounts say that Acanthus of Sparta was the first competitor to run in the nude.

Competitors wanted to show off their strength as a tribute to Zeus. They oiled their bodies so that they glistened in the sunlight. Competing naked quickly became the norm.

Ancient pottery was highly decorated. It depicted many of the competitions that were held at the time.



Only freeborn Greek men were allowed to compete in the games. Slaves and women were not allowed to attend the games or compete in them.



The Ancient Olympic Sports

In 684 BCE, the games were extended to three days to allow for more events. Then, in 472 BCE, the games were extended to 5 days. The Olympic Games included the following events:



Winners received an olive leaf crown as a symbol of their success.

Running (various distances)

Wrestling (oiled combatants, no biting or eye gouging)

Boxing (fingers and hands wrapped in leather strapping)

Jumping (long jump using weights called halteres)

Discus & Javelin Throw (similar to today)

Pankration (martial art combining wrestling and boxing)

Pentathlon (running, jumping, discus, javelin, wrestling)

Equestrian events (horse races, chariot races)



Athletes traveled from far and wide to attend the festival and compete in the games at Olympia.

The games took place every four years, even during times of war. An Olympic truce was announced so people could safely travel to Olympia for the festival.

- **Combat sports only ended when one competitor raised their index fingers to indicate surrender.**
- **Competitors who cheated were punished with fines.**

English words that come from Ancient Greek

gymnasium and **gymnastics**

from the Greek word **gymnos** which means

lightly clad or naked

athletics

from the Greek word **athlon** which means **prize**



