



The starting gate, for ancient Olympians, was very different from the starting line for today's runners.

This image depicts the starting gate at the stadium in Olympia. Athletes, participating in foot races, started from this place.

Professor Hugh M. Lee, from the University of Maryland at College Park, tells us [more about it](#) (in an April 6, 2004 article published in *Archaeology*):

*Unlike the modern oval track surrounding an infield, the ancient running course was a rectangular field marked off at each end by stone blocks set into the ground in a line or sill called a balbis. The balbis usually had parallel grooves carved along its length, as well as sockets at regular intervals for posts.*

*The posts in the balbis served a dual purpose, as part of the starting gate and as turning posts (kampteres). The grooves marked the positions for the runners' feet.*

*As sculpture and vase painting reveal, the runners employed a standing start, the left foot slightly ahead of the right. The back end of the grooves was vertical to allow the runners to grip with their toes and shove off, whereas the forward end was beveled toward the track to keep the runners from stubbing their toes.*

Click on the image for a much-closer view.

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