

0. ATHLETES IN ACTION - Story Preface

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This image, depicting detail from an ancient Greek vase, illustrates Nike (the Greek goddess of victory) crowning an athlete whom she has chosen to win. The event has not-yet occurred, and the athlete is oblivious to Nike's presence. Preparing for the event, he anoints himself with oil in the dressing room. Image online via Wikimedia Commons.

The stadium at Olympia held 45,000 spectators. The high priestess of Demeter Chamyne, a Greek goddess, was the only married woman allowed to watch the events.

No time records of early foot races exist since there was no way to measure how long it took for the winner to reach the finish line. What does survive are statues and pottery depicting the runners.

A few important points about some events will highlight differences between the ancient and modern games:

- A key running event was called the Hoplitodromos where athletes ran in full battle armor.
- The pentathlon included jumping (where, accompanied by flute music, athletes jumped into a pit holding halteres in their hands); running; javelin (separated into distinct events for distance and accuracy); discus throwing; and wrestling (part of the pentathlon in the Olympics but a separate event in the Panhellenic games).
- Wrestlers practiced as a trainer, rod in hand, coached their efforts.
- Boxing, as depicted in the mural from Acrotiri (found in ancient Thera, known today as Santorini) where two children are having a go at each other, was one of the oldest events.
- As boxers participated in their sport, Nike (the winged goddess of Victory) watched.
- Horse racing, an aristocratic sport then as it is now, included the quadriga (four-horse chariot) race which, according to ancient accounts, was the most spectacular (a la Ben Hur) equestrian event of all.

The athletes competed for a crown of wild olive leaves, made from a tree (called The Olive of the Beautiful Crown) which grew in the Altis. During the games, the crowns rested on a gold and ivory table in the Temple of Hera.

Like today, the real rewards were far more than a crown. So important was a win - for the athlete, for his family, for his town - that specific Olympic victories were used as historical reference points. (The battle of Marathon, for example, took place in the third year of the Olympiad in which Tisicrates of Croton [scroll down 60%] won the stadion for the second time.)

Thousands of years later, we still know the names of athletes because Greek writers immortalized their exploits in stories and poems.

We are left to wonder ... is there any chance that victors, in the modern games, will be talked about a thousand years from now?

One thing is sure ... Pindar's tradition of composing Olympiad poems - in Greek - has recently been revived for the modern games. Let's examine the poem which will open the XXX Olympiad, in London.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/ATHLETES-IN-ACTION-Ancient-Olympics>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

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Media Stream



Altar of Demeter Chamyne

Image online, courtesy Greek-language textbook.

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Olympic Statue - 490 B.C.

Image, described above, online via "The European Spectator."

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Halteres

Image online, courtesy the University of Oregon [website](#).

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Ancient Olympic Athletes

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons. License: CC BY-SA 3.0.

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Ancient Olympic Wrestling

Image online courtesy Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports.

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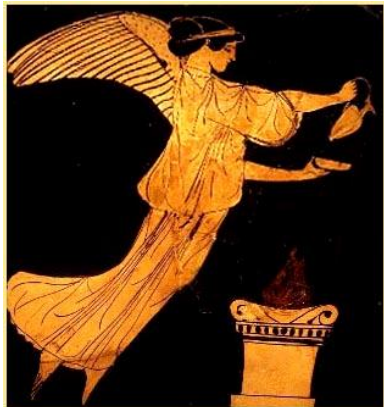
Boxing Mural From Acrotiri

Image online via Wikimedia Commons.

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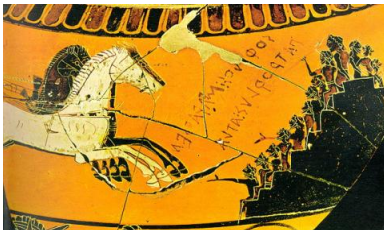
T24.6 Nike

Nike - Winged Goddess of Victory

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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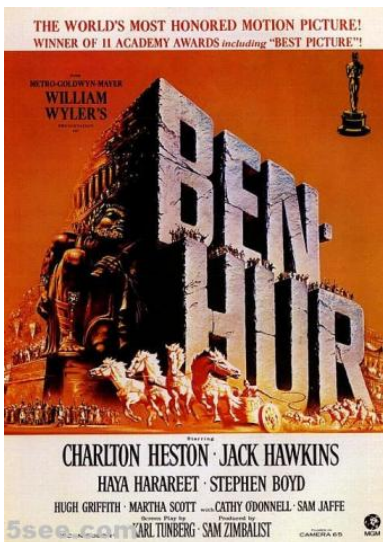


Fans Cheering at an Ancient Chariot Race

Image online, courtesy The Hellenic Ministry of Culture.

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Ben Hur and His Quadriga

Image online via Wikimedia Commons.

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Olympics, Ancient - Honors for the Athletes

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