



The story of The Olympic Games: A Journey to Ancient Greece

Where it all began

The Olympic Games is now a leading international sporting event (including both summer and winter games), with thousands of athletes from around the world, striving to compete in this revered event. However, its origins came from much more humble beginnings.

No one is sure how the Olympic Games really began, but the first recorded event took place in Olympia about 3000 years ago. Olympia was in the south west of Greece, not near Mount Olympus, which people often assume. It was a beautiful area, surrounded by lush olive groves. Many people came to visit Olympia to worship Zeus and his wife Hera; the king and queen of the Greek Gods. Some people believe that the games were started by Zeus's son, who was the Greek hero Herakles; you may know him better by the name the Roman's gave him: Hercules. Others believe that the games were in memory of Prince Pelops of Lydia, who was famous for his chariot racing. However, it is without question it is most likely the Olympic games began as part of a religious festival, which took place in Olympia, in honour of Zeus.

The competition

At first there was only one event: a running race, in total contrast to the many events we now enjoy at the games. The track was wide enough for 20 people to run comfortably side by side. It was also long (190m) and straight. The purpose of these games was to keep Greek men fit in preparation for the intensity of war. Only men took part in the games: women who wanted to race had a separate festival called the Heraia. Married women were not even allowed to watch the games - only men and unmarried women! Traditionally, the Greek athletes were naked as they competed. This gave them a chance to show off their muscular bodies. Fortunately, that is a tradition that has not been kept in the modern games.

How the games grew

From 776BC the games were held every four years, usually in August. The four-year time span was called an Olympiad. The games proved very popular. Spectators came from other countries nearby - including Italy, Syria and Egypt. In 456BC the Temple of Zeus was completed at Olympia. This brought even more people to the games as they all wanted to see the magnificent statue of Zeus that was inside! The statue was a staggering 13m tall!

After 100 years of the Games the original running race had been added to, and there were 18 events that took place. The first event was the chariot race, followed by one of the most popular events: the pentathlon, which was made up of five different sporting activities. These were running, wrestling, the long jump, the javelin, and the discus. All events, which are still very popular today.

The Olympic Games continued for many years but in 393AD, 1,166 years after they first began, a Roman Emperor named Theodosius I banned them. He ordered his soldiers to destroy the Temple of Zeus. Sadly, Olympia fell into ruin after being struck by an earthquake and flood, which buried the ruins underground, being lost for more than a thousand years.

The games we know today

The idea of a modern Olympic Games was started by a Frenchman called Baron Pierre de Coubertin in 1896. He designed the famous logo with five coloured rings. These represent the continents of the world joined in peace and harmony. De Coubertin also wrote the Olympic creed, which explained what he thought the Olympics were all about.



The Olympics are now the biggest sporting event in the world. There are many more events and sports to participate in and there is even a separate Winter Games every four years. Months before the Olympics begin a flame is lit in Olympia and is passed through a relay of torches. The torches are carried by foot, air, road, rail, or water to the chosen stadium. During the opening ceremony, the last torch lights a cauldron, which burns throughout the Games. A flame was kept burning during the ancient Games as well!

Only time will tell if the modern Games can carry on for as long as the ancient ones!