

## The Olympic Games

The Greeks loved sport and the Olympic Games were the biggest sporting event in the ancient calendar. The ancient Olympics were not just about the sport, they were a religious festival too. The Olympic Games began over 2,700 years ago in Olympia, in south west Greece. The stadium in Olympia was built during the 4th century BC. The Olympic Games were held in the honour of Zeus.

Every four years, around 50,000 people came from all over the Greek world to watch and take part. The ancient games were also a religious festival, held in honour of Zeus, the king of the gods.

There were no gold, silver or bronze medals. Instead the winners were given a wreath of leaves and a hero's welcome back home. Athletes competed for the glory of their city and winners were seen as being touched by the gods.



Before the games began, messengers were sent out to announce a 'sacred truce' or a peace. This meant that any wars were called off, so that people could travel safely to Olympia.

The entire games were dedicated to Zeus. Visitors flocked to see the Temple of Zeus. Inside stood a huge gold and ivory statue of the king of the gods himself.

The main event at the Olympics was not a sporting event, but a sacrifice. On the third day of the games, 100 oxen were sacrificed and burnt on the Altar of Zeus. This altar was not made of stone, instead it was made from the leftover ash of all the sacrificed oxen. By around 200AD, the mound of ash stood six meters high!

Only men, boys and unmarried girls were allowed to attend the Olympic Games. All married women were barred. If they were caught sneaking in, they could be thrown off the side of a mountain as punishment!

However, women could still own horses in the chariot races at the Olympics and unmarried women had their own festival at Olympia every four years. This was called the Heraia and was held in honour of Hera, Zeus's wife. Winners were awarded crowns of sacred olive branches, the same as men. In ancient Greece, only Spartan women were really interested in sport.

## Ancient Olympic Games Events

**There was running, jumping, discus throwing, wrestling, boxing, pankration and equestrian events.**