



Olympia, Greece

## The Olympics in Ancient Greece

The first written records of the ancient Olympic Games date to 776 B.C., when a cook named Coroebus won the only event—a 192-meter footrace called the stade (the origin of the modern “stadium”)-to become the first Olympic champion. However, it is generally believed that the Games had been going on for many years by that time. Legend has it that Heracles (the Roman [Hercules](#)), son of Zeus and the mortal woman Alcmene, founded the Games, which by the end of the 6th century B.C had become the most famous of all Greek sporting festivals. The ancient Olympics were held every four years between August 6 and September 19 during a religious festival honouring Zeus.

The Games were named for their location at Olympia, a sacred site located near the western coast of the Peloponnese peninsula in southern Greece.

After the Roman Empire conquered Greece in the mid-2nd century B.C., the Games continued, but their standards and quality declined. In one notorious example from A.D. 67, the decadent Emperor [Nero](#) entered an Olympic chariot race, only to disgrace himself by declaring himself the winner even after he fell off his chariot during the event.

It would be another 1,500 years before the Games would rise again, largely thanks to the efforts of Baron Pierre de Coubertin (1863-1937) of France.

The first modern Olympics were held in Athens, Greece, in 1896. In the opening ceremony, King Georgios I and a crowd of 60,000 spectators welcomed 280 participants from 13 nations (all male), who would compete in 43 events, including track and field, gymnastics, swimming, wrestling, cycling, tennis, weightlifting, shooting and fencing.

The 1896 Games featured the first Olympic marathon, which followed the 25-mile route run by the Greek soldier who brought news of a victory over the Persians from Marathon to Athens in 490 B.C. Fittingly, Greece's Spyridon Louis won the first gold medal in the event. In 1924, the distance would be standardized to 26 miles and 385 yards.

There were no games in 1916, during World War I, and in 1940 and 1944, during World War II



The official symbol of the modern Games is five interlocking coloured rings, representing the continents of North and South America, Asia, Africa, Europe and Australia. The Olympic flag, featuring this symbol on a white background, flew for the first time at the Antwerp Games in 1920.

The Olympics truly took off as an international sporting event after 1924, when the VIII Games were held in Paris. Some 3,000 athletes (with more than 100 women among them) from 44 nations competed that year, and for the first time the Games featured a closing ceremony. The Winter Olympics debuted that year, including such events as figure skating, ice hockey, bobsledding and the biathlon. Eighty years later, when the 2004 Summer Olympics returned to Athens for the first time in more than a century, nearly 11,000 athletes from a record 201 countries competed. In a gesture that joined both ancient and modern Olympic traditions, the shotput competition that year was held at the site of the classical Games in Olympia.

Tokyo were due to host the 2020 Olympics. Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, these games have been postponed until 2021.

### Questions.

1. When was the first written record of the Olympic games?
2. Who were the parents of Hercules?
3. Where did they get the name Olympics from?
4. How often were the games held?
5. Give an example of how the games declined in AD 67?
7. Where and when did the modern Olympics start?
8. Where did they get the idea for running a marathon?
9. How many rings are there on the Olympic flag?
10. What do the rings stand for?
11. Where and what year did women take part in the games?
12. Give examples of games played during the (a) Olympic games and (b) the Winter Olympic Games.
13. Who is due to host the next Olympic Games?
14. Why are they not hosting the games in 2020?
15. Research an Olympic record. Who holds the record? What country are they from? What sport? What's the record? Do you think this Olympic record can be broken in Tokyo?

