

## The Olympics

What we call the Olympics—considered the world's premier sports competition—are actually inspired by the ancient Olympic games. These ancient games were a series of athletic competitions that took place in Olympia, Greece, sometime between the 8th century B.C.E. and the 4th century C.E. Free-born, Greek-speaking, male representatives from city-states across Greece gathered every four years to take part in various running, throwing, jumping, and chariot-riding competitions. While the competitions always took place in Olympia, athletes from any city-state or kingdom could compete—they simply had to meet the entrance criteria. Originally, the men wore loincloths during competitions. As time went on, they eventually competed in the nude, in part because the Olympics were a time to recognize and celebrate the strength of the human body. Because the men competed totally nude, though, married women were expressly forbidden to watch—under penalty of death!

Initially, the ancient Olympic games took place for only one day, but as events were added the festival ultimately grew to five days. The initial competition was called the “stadion,” which was a fairly short sprint of somewhere in the neighborhood of 200 meters, or the length of one stadium. The second race added sometime later was called the “diaulos,” which was the length of one lap of the stadium, or about 400 meters. A few years after the advent of the diaulos, the “dolichos” was added to the races. It was somewhere between eighteen and twenty-four laps around the stadium, roughly three miles total.

Not surprisingly, the games also took on political importance, and were used by city-states to establish their dominance over other city-states. City-states maintained an often tenuous balance with each other: the dichotomy between needing each other for political and military alliances while simultaneously competing for limited geographical resources resulted in a frequently-conflicted political environment. The Games, therefore, created an opportunity for the city-states to “compete” peacefully. In fact, these peaceful competitions led politicians to work together to create alliances, much like they do today.

The games didn't only involve athletic pursuits, though. Sculptors, poets, and other artists would gather for competitions and showcase their wares to passers-by, hoping to turn them into patrons. Sculptors liked to highlight the natural body, its muscles, and the way it moved. Poets, too, wanted to honor the athletes and so wrote songs in praise of the victors. These songs often lived on for generations. The Games also had religious importance: They are thought to have first been held in honor of Zeus, and his statue at Olympia was long regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The sporting events were frequently accompanied by religious sacrifices to Zeus and other gods, too.

Just as historians debate when the first Olympic games were held, it is unclear why the ancient Greek Olympic games came to a halt. Some believe that Roman emperor Theodosius I, in an effort to spread Christianity, decreed that all pagan rituals and cults be eliminated. Others believe that his successor, Theodosius II, later demanded the destruction of all Greek temples, leaving the Olympics with nowhere to take place.

Sometime in the 17th century, interest in the games sprang up anew in several locations. ■ The first stirring of interest came up in England, and then France about a hundred years later. ■ Within another hundred years, in the early to mid-1800s, renewed interest surfaced in Greece, when the Greek War of Independence emancipated the country from Ottoman Rule in 1821. Greek-Romanian philanthropist Evangelos Zappas wrote to King Otto of Greece in 1856 and offered to fully underwrite a revival of the games. ■ In fact, the first modern Games that took place under the governance of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) took place in that very same stadium in Greece. ■ During these games, 241 athletes from 14 nations competed in 43 events. Today's Olympics have come a long way from their humble origins: More than 200 countries send a cumulative 13,000 or more athletes to compete in 400 events spread across 33 different sports.

# Reading Practice Drill #5

1. The word premier in the passage is closest in meaning to
- a. first

b. leading

c. only

d. chief officer
2. The author states that today's games were modeled after ancient Olympic games that
- a. started sometime around the 4th century B.C.E.

b. ended sometime in the 8th century C.E.

c. took place in Olympia, Greece

d. were open to men and women of all ages and backgrounds
3. The word they in the passage refers to
- a. male athletes

b. loincloths

c. competitions

d. married women
4. The word expressly in the passage most nearly means
- a. quickly

b. explicitly

c. took place in Olympia, Greece

d. emotionally
5. The word ultimately in the passage is closest in meaning to
- a. best

b. most respected

c. fundamentally

d. eventually
6. According to the passages, the ancient Games gave city-states the opportunity to
- a. compete peacefully

b. form military alliances

c. create political agreements

d. challenge other city-states for natural resources
7. The word they in the passage refers to
- a. city-states

b. politicians

c. the Games

d. competitions
8. The word patrons in the passage is closest in meaning to
- a. athletes

b. artists

c. competitors

d. buyers

9. According to paragraph 5, historians are unsure about
- a. where the first ancient Games took place

b. when the first ancient Games took place

c. why the ancient Games came to an end

d. who took part in ancient Games
10. Look at the four squares [■] that indicate where the following sentence could be added to the passage.
- He also paid for the entire restoration of the Panathenaic Stadium so it could be used to host future Games.
- Where would the sentence best fit?
- Click on a square [■] to add the sentence to the passage.
11. The word successor in the passage is closest in meaning to
- a. someone who came before

b. someone who came after

c. someone who was a contemporary

d. someone who competed
12. The word emancipated in the passage most nearly means
- a. freed from

b. subjected to

c. proclaimed aloud

d. began again
13. The word their refers to
- a. ancient Games

b. modern Games

c. ancient athletes

d. modern athletes
14. Directions: Select the appropriate phrases from the answer choices and match them to the Games they describe. TWO of the answer choices will not be used. *This question is worth 4 points.*

Answer Choices	Ancient Games	Modern Games
Interest began in London	•	•
Had few competitions	•	•
Women couldn't watch	•	•
Elite sports competition	•	•
Mandatory drug testing	•	•
Held in honor of gods		•
Attended by artists		
Inspired by other games		
Were paid for by a philanthropist		
Take place all over the world		