The History of the Olympic Games

The Olympic Games were thought to have started over 2,700 years ago in ancient Greece. Read on to find out about the first ancient Games and the beginning of the modern Games.

The First Olympic Games

The first ancient Olympic Games were believed to have started in 776 BC. These Games took place in Olympia, Greece. They were held every four years and contained several sporting events. However, the main focus was as a religious ceremony to honour the king of the Greek gods, Zeus.

Zeus is said to have travelled to Olympia from his home in Mount Olympus in 1200 BC. He announced his visit by throwing his thunderbolt from Mount Olympus into Olympia. This became the setting for the first ancient Olympic Games. People travelled from all over Greece to see the Games and visit the Temple of Zeus.

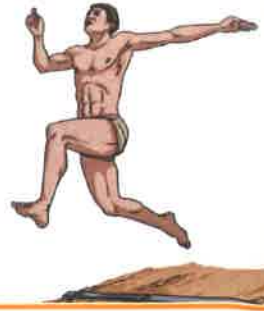## Ancient Olympic Events

Running

During the running events, competitors would run up and down a track that was 192 metres long. Despite being rebuilt several times, the track always stayed the same length. Some people believe that this is because 192 metres is how long the Greek hero Hercules could run on a single breath.

Wrestling and Boxing

The wrestling and boxing matches seen at the ancient Olympic Games were often much more violent than those seen today. One of the most dangerous matches was known as pankration. In this match, the only rule was that you couldn't bite your opponent or poke them in the eye.

Long Jump

Competitors in the long jump would hold large weights in their hands and swing their arms around. This would help them to jump longer distances. A man on a flute often played music for the athletes that would help them to time their jumps.

The End of the Ancient Olympic Games

When ancient Greece was invaded by the Roman Empire in the 2nd century BC, the Games continued. However, it is thought that the quality began to go downhill. In AD 67, a Roman emperor named Nero took part in the chariot race, which was a dangerous race on chariots pulled by horses. Although he fell off during the race, he still told everyone that he was the winner.

By AD 393, an emperor named Theodosius I called for the ancient Olympic Games to be cancelled. This ended the Games after nearly 1,200 years.

The Modern Olympic Games

Around 1,500 years later, a French baron named Pierre de Coubertin suggested the idea of holding an international athletics competition. He wanted it to be held every four years just like the ancient games in Olympia. When his idea was accepted, he started the International Olympic Committee.

The first modern Olympic Games were held in 1896 in Athens, Greece. Since then, the modern Olympic Games have been held every four years. Throughout their history, the modern Games have been cancelled or postponed four times. Once in 1916 due to the First World War, in 1940 and 1944 due to the Second World War and again in 2020 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.