

The program of the Olympic games

The [Olympic games](#) were held in mid summer, late July or early August. By then, the athletes had already been present in nearby Elis for a month to prepare themselves. The [ambassadors](#) who announced the games and the [sacred truce](#) all over the Greek world, had already left in the spring. During the more than thousand years in which the games were held at Olympia, there were several changes in the program. In the first centuries, the games lasted only one or two days. Because more and more events were added, these days became always fuller. ➡ For this reason, a program of five days was fixed in 468 BC.

- day 1: [Olympic oath](#) of the athletes and of the [hellanodikai](#) before the statue of [Zeus](#) in the [council house](#)
- day 2: [horse races](#) and [pentathlon](#)
- day 3: rites for the hero [Pelops](#), procession of all participants, the [hellanodikai](#) and the [ambassadors](#) of the different cities and a sacrifice of a hundred cows to [Zeus](#)
- day 4: [running](#) and [combat sports](#)
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- <http://ancientolympics.arts.kuleuven.be/eng/tb006en.html>
- day 5: banquet for the victors in the [house of magistrates](#)

[Musical events](#), which figure in many other games, were never added to the games, except for the contests for [heralds and trumpeters](#). In the Hellenistic period, the games for the [boys](#) were moved from day four to day three. In the Roman period, the games were spread over six days. The contests of day two were divided over two days: one for the pentathlon and one for the horse races.

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Five-Day Program

For many years, the Olympics were a one-day festival. This was certainly sufficient during the early years; indeed, for the first 13 Olympiads, the stadion (200-meter sprint) was the only event. As more events were added, the number of days grew, until from the fifth century on, the five-day schedule was standard.

Day One—No competitions took place on the first day. After the opening ceremony, which included the taking of oaths by the athletes and judges, the competitors were registered and schedules were drawn up. Sacrifices were presented to the gods and the opening of the Games were celebrated.

Day Two—On the second day there were special events for the boys. This usually included boxing and pankration wrestling. The day ended with celebrations for the young participants.

Day Three—This impressive day began with the "hecatombe," a sacrifice of 100 oxen to Zeus by the Eleans (Elis controlled Olympia and the Games). Next, the primary events began, starting with chariot races and horse races in the Hippodrome. Then came the pentathlon, a combination of five events (sprint, long jump, discus, javelin, and wrestling), in the stadium.

Day Four—The fourth day opened with the foot races: the stadion (200 meters), the diaulos (400 meters), and the dolichos (2,000 meters). This was followed by wrestling, boxing, and pankration wrestling. The final event of each Olympics was a spectacle called the hoplitodromia, a 200-meter sprint in helmet, greaves (calf armor), and shield.

Day Five—The final day was one long closing ceremony. The gods were venerated with sacrifices and ceremonies. The victors were crowned with olive wreaths at the elaborate awards ceremony, followed by feasts were held in their honor.

Stadium

Athletes of old did not require an elaborate venue—until the first stadium was established around 560 BC they simply used a flat, rectangular area of ground. "Stadium I" was nothing more than a marked area of track and slight slope for spectators. Stadium II, built at the end of the 6th century BC, was slightly improved. The final version, built around 350 BC (which can be visited today at the ruins of Olympia), was larger, built further away from the sanctuary, and had a capacity of 45,000. There were embankments on all sides for the spectators, a small dais for the judges, a grand entrance tunnel from the sanctuary, and it was ringed by an aqueduct that delivered water to the spectators.

The track of the stadium was a rectangular area, 212 meters long. The ground was a mixture of earth and sand. The start and finish lines were marked by two trenches made of stone and equipped with grooves to form a kind of starting block. One amazing feature of these ancient stadiums is the absence of bends at the corners to accommodate the turns. It is not known how this problem was handled, though a turning post of some kind must surely have played a part.

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Track Events

STADION (1st Olympiad; 776 BC)—The "stadion" was a simple sprint from one end of the stadium to the other, a distance of 600 feet (192.27 meters). This premiere competition of the ancient Olympics was the only event for the first thirteen Olympiads and was never omitted from the program in a millennium. In addition, the stadion became part of the pentathlon when it was introduced in 708 BC.

DIAULOS (14th Olympiad; 724 BC)—At 1,200 feet (384.54 meters), the "diaulos" was double the length of the stadion. This second-oldest event was run in a straight line from one end of the stadium to the other and back, rather than in an elliptical lap, as we do today.

DOLICHOS (15th Olympiad; 720 BC)—Although the exact distance that "dolichos" runner had to traverse is not clear, it is known that this was a lengthy race, requiring great endurance. It is possible that the length was 24 stadia, or 14,400 feet (4,615 meters).

HOPLITODROMOS (65th Olympiad; 520 BC)—This theatrical event was the grand finale of each Olympiad. Participants raced the length of a diaulos (1,200 feet / 384.54 meters) with helmet, greaves (lower-leg armor), and a round shield. This militaristic closing event was a reminder that the Olympic truce was almost over.

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Pentathlon

(18th Olympiad; 708 BC)—The pentathlon consisted of five competitions. The 200-

