



## 4: The Olympic Games (but not as we know them)

Running. Jumping. Throwing. Wrestling. Boxing. Horse racing. We've got it all going on!

Welcome to Olympia, the site of the original Olympic Games!

My name is Leonidas. I can run. Really fast. I've pretty much dominated the running events at four consecutive Olympic Games. One day they'll make a statue of me with the inscription 'He had the speed of a God.'

The Olympic Games are a massive deal for us. They're held every four years to honour of the King of the Gods - Zeus. So they're as much a religious festival as a sporting event. The statue of Zeus here is one of the seven wonders of the Ancient World, and on the third day - the middle day of the Games - 100 oxen are sacrificed in his honour.

The games are so important that a truce - or *ekecheiria* - is called across the city-states of Greece. Meaning all wars or disputes must be paused so that athletes and spectators can travel safely to and from Olympia.

And this is the stadium where it all happens. Now these guys are just training so they're allowed to wear pants. But when they perform during the Games they've got to be naked and covered in olive oil. Yep...

So, let's start with running. As I said, I'm the best...of all time. All the races take place on a straight track in the stadium that's about 185 metres long. The *stadion* race was one length; the *diaulos* was two lengths; and the *dolichos* was...erm... longer. I didn't do that race so I have no idea how long it was, and people can't seem to agree how long it actually was anyway.

I've won the *stadion*, the *diaulos* and another race called the *hoplitodromos* when we run in full military armour. In 40-degree heat. Pretty tough.

There are combat sports - wrestling, boxing and pankration...which is a mix of boxing and wrestling where pretty much anything is allowed...except biting and eye-gouging. No one needs that.

The throwing events are *discus*: athletes hurl a heavy diskos made of bronze, iron or stone as far as they can. And *javelin*: athletes hurl a wooden spear as far as they can. Fun if you like that kind of thing.

In the long jump athletes jump as far as they can, using weights in their hands to gain momentum, rather than a long run up.

There's also a man playing a flute to help them get into a swinging rhythm for the jump. Strange, I know.

The *pentathlon* is a five-event contest combining running, jumping, discus, javelin and wrestling.

Now you may have noticed there aren't any women in here. That's because women are not allowed to take part in the Games. Except in one capacity: training the horses for the equestrian events.

The first woman to win an event - as a trainer that is - was Cynisca of Sparta. She won the four-horse chariot race with her team in two consecutive Olympics.

Her victories have inspired women all over Greece to start taking part in the horse events.





The other events are a two-horse chariot race, and a horse-riding contest. The chariot races are pretty violent, with everyone bashing into each other as they race.

Oh, and the chariot drivers are the only ones who aren't naked. Guess it might spook the horses.

If you win your event - or multiple events like me - you're given a wreath of leaves, and you become a legend in your home city.

'Touched by the Gods' as they say. I'm not one to disagree.

