

Just how far back in history organized athletic contests were held remains a matter of debate, but it is reasonably certain that they occurred in [Greece](#) almost 3,000 years ago. However ancient in origin, by the end of the 6th century BCE at least four Greek sporting festivals, sometimes called “classical games,” had achieved major importance: the Olympic Games, held at [Olympia](#); the [Pythian Games](#) at [Delphi](#); the [Nemean Games](#) at Nemea; and the [Isthmian Games](#), held near [Corinth](#). Later, similar festivals were held in nearly 150 cities as far afield as [Rome](#), [Naples](#), Odessus, [Antioch](#), and [Alexandria](#). Of all the games held throughout Greece, the Olympic Games were the most famous. Held every four years between August 6 and September 19, they occupied such an important place in Greek history that in late antiquity historians measured time by the interval between them—an Olympiad. The Olympic Games, like almost all Greek games, were an [intrinsic](#) part of a religious festival. They were held in honour of [Zeus](#) at Olympia by the [city-state](#) of [Elis](#) in the northwestern [Peloponnese](#). The first Olympic [champion](#) listed in the records was Coroebus of Elis, a cook, who won the sprint race in 776 BCE. Notions that the Olympics began much earlier than 776 BCE are founded on [myth](#), not historical evidence. According to one [legend](#), for example, the Games were founded by [Heracles](#), son of Zeus and [Alcmene](#). At the meeting in 776 BCE there was apparently only one event, a [footrace](#) that covered one length of the track at Olympia, but other events were added over the ensuing decades. The race, known as the [stade](#), was about 192 metres (210 yards) long. The word *stade* also came to refer to the track on which the race was held and is the origin of the modern English word *stadium*. In 724 BCE a two-length race, the *diaulos*, roughly similar to the 400-metre race, was included, and four years later the *dolichos*, a long-distance race possibly [comparable](#) to the modern 1,500- or 5,000-metre events, was added. [Wrestling](#) and the [pentathlon](#) were introduced in 708 BCE. The latter was an all-around competition consisting of five events—the [long jump](#), the [javelin throw](#), the [discus throw](#), a footrace, and wrestling.