

Introduction

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ROMANO

One of the most popular aspects of modern western culture is its universal interest in sports and athletics. Our world is permeated with athletic contests, youthful athletic images, athletic slogans and athletic accoutrements. College and professional athletics are multi-million dollar businesses, and the modern Olympic Games have taken on major world political, social, and economic proportions. Running, jogging, and physical fitness are a current obsession with millions of Americans.

What, you may ask, does this have to do with The University Mu-

seum and *Expedition Magazine*? How do modern athletics relate to the study of archaeology and anthropology? You may be surprised to learn that there is a good deal of evidence for athletics from the history, literature, and archaeology of ancient and more recent cultures, and that this evidence often relates to the contemporary world in numerous ways. The theme of this issue of *Expedition* is athletics, with examples from a number of varied cultures represented by the collections and the research of The University Museum.

The word "athletics" today can mean many things. It can include amateur as well as professional participants. It may at times encompass such competitive activities as basketball, baseball, crew, football,

hockey, soccer, wrestling, tennis and track and field, to name only a few. The word *athlete* is originally an ancient Greek word with a very specific meaning, "one who competes for a prize," and is related to two other Greek words *athlos* meaning "contest" and *athlon* meaning "prize" (Fig. 1). The original and still primary meaning of athletics, therefore, is tied very closely to the concept of a competition for which a prize is given. The papers in this issue are mostly restricted in theme to formal athletic competition in which there is a contest and sometimes a prize. Non-competitive sports, recreational activities, pastimes and board games are generally excluded from consideration.

Some of the earliest information



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Detail of boxing match from a black figure Attic hydria (a three-handed vessel for carrying water) in the collection of The University Museum (#51-32-1). The two cauldrons located between the boxers are likely to be the prizes for the contest. A referee and a spectator flank the contestants on each side. Ca. 550 B.C. H. 31.9 cm., rim D. 17.7 cm.

about athletics is from ancient Mesopotamia. Professor Åke Sjöberg of the Babylonian Section of the Museum and his colleagues are reading, translating, and interpreting thousands of Sumerian cuneiform tablets of the third and second millennia B.C., a number of which have to do with the evidence for Sumerian athletics. This project, when completed, will tell us much about what may well be the earliest examples of athletic competition in the world.

Based on all the available evidence at the present, the earliest record of formalized athletic contests and full-blown athletic festivals comes from ancient Greece. Greek literary, historical, and archaeological sources confirm the existence of a rich tradition of athletic competition. It is, of course, this tradition upon which the introduction of modern track and field competition in the western world was based in the 19th century, and that was the inspiration for the inception and organization of the modern Olympic Games. So indebted are we to an-

cient Greek athletics that not only have we modeled many of our track and field events on theirs, but we have also borrowed their words for these events, e.g., *pentathlon*, *dekathlon*, *diskos*. The name of the *marathon* is from the ancient Greek place name in Attica, site of the important battle between the Greeks and the Persians in 490 B.C. According to Herodotus, a 5th century B.C. historian, an Athenian professional day runner by the name of Pheidippides was sent to solicit help from the Spartans upon the news of the Persian landing at Marathon. Pheidippides covered the distance of about 150 miles in two days. This ancient legend accounted for the introduction of the modern marathon in the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896. (The marathon was never an ancient athletic event.) The site of many modern athletic contests is the stadium; originally a Greek word, *stadion*, meaning "standing place," it refers to the religious structure found as a part of Greek sanctuaries. It was, of course, the place where Greek athletics

were contested and where spectators were accommodated. As far as we know, there was no precedent for the Greek stadium in any earlier civilization (Figs. 2, 3).

The Mediterranean Section of The University Museum has among its holdings a number of examples of Greek vases with scenes of ancient athletes and athletics. Two of the finest of these are illustrated on the cover of this issue. The late 6th century B.C. black figure amphora, on the left, depicts a boxing match between the two central figures, each of whom has his hands wrapped with ox-hide strips, early boxing gloves (*himantes*). A trainer or judge stands to the left and an assistant stands to the right holding additional leather strips. The early 5th century B.C. Attic red figure kylix, on the right, depicts a wrestling scene where two athletes compete under the watchful eye of the trainer to the left. Above the athletes, on the wall of the training area, is seen a *diskos* in a sling and two *halteres* or jumping weights, which were carried by ancient long



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Fourth century B.C. stadium at Olympia as seen from the northeast. The stadium has been excavated and reconstructed by the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Athen. (Photo courtesy Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Athen.)

jumpers. Behind the wrestler on the left are probably two javelins set into the ground. Wrestling, discus, long jump and the javelin were four of the five events of the ancient pentathlon. The fifth event was the *stadion*, a footrace one length of the stadion or 600 feet.

Many aspects of the modern Olympic Games have striking similarities with the ancient Games, including the political dimension that has received so much publicity in recent years. This is the subject of the essay on the ancient Olympic Games included here.

The Romans were influenced to a great degree by the Greek athletic tradition and held Greek-like festivals in Rome itself. The Romans were also innovators in the athletic sphere; for example, they conceived of a new type of elaborate architectural complex devoted to baths, pools, racecourses and other recreation areas. Spectacles, for which the Romans were more famous, lie strictly speaking outside the realm of athletics. Professor Donald White of the Mediterranean Section summarizes our knowledge about Roman athletics and Dr. Murray McClellan comments on a Roman ball game and its connection with an object from the Museum collection. Ball games were an important part of Roman life, as they were in ancient Greece, though technically not "athletic" in the sense that they were casual recreational sport rather than part of a competition for a prize.

The Etruscans, neighbors of the Romans to the north, also appear to have borrowed heavily from Greek athletic tradition. We have limited written information about Etruscan athletic practice, but there exist colorful and informative wall paintings from Etruscan tombs with depictions of athletic scenes, as well as occasional bronze, terracotta or stone sculptures of athletes. Karen Vellucci gives us insights into the difficulties of obtaining a dispassionate account of Etruscan athletics.

Important original research relating to the subject of Mesoamerican athletics is being conducted by the American Section of The University Museum. The excavations at



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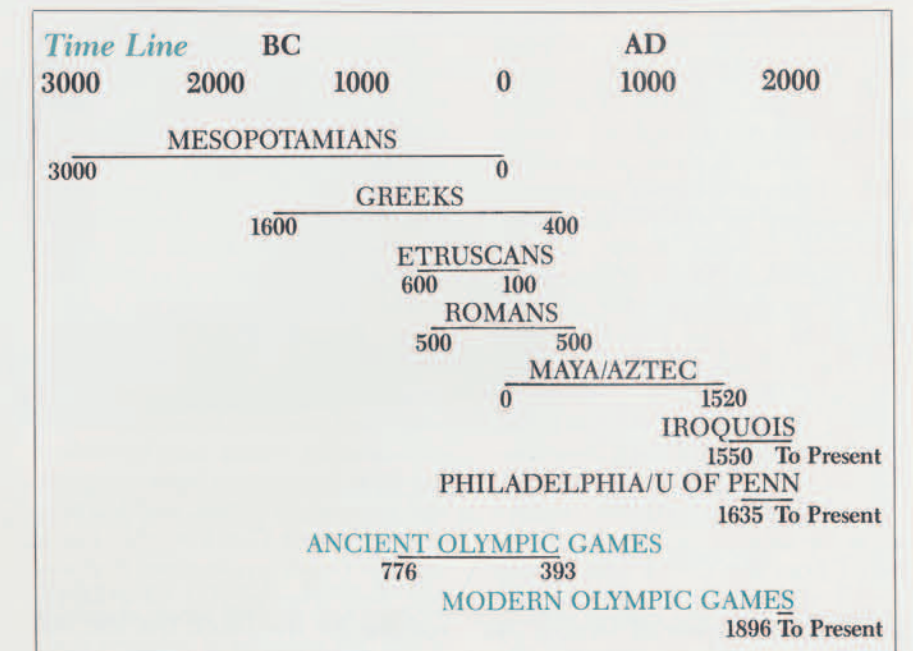
The Panathenaic stadium in Athens, originally built in the 2nd century A.D. and reconstructed for the first celebration of the modern Olympic Games in 1896.

the Maya site of Tikal in Guatemala between 1956–1970 produced quantities of new information. Included here is a report on the subject of the ball courts at Tikal by Dr. Christopher Jones, one of the excavators of the site, prior to formal publication of this information in the Tikal Report Series of The University Museum.

Lacrosse, a native North American game, may have been first developed by the Iroquois in the 16th

century. Dr. Marshall Becker describes the organization and rules of the original game and comments on its political and social importance.

Finally, to bring the subject of athletics still closer to The University Museum, Dr. John Cotter gives us a glimpse of athletics from Colonial America and specifically from Philadelphia and the University of Pennsylvania, an early leader in the development of intercollegiate athletics in this country.



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The cultures discussed in this issue represent a span of several thousand years.



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The intersection of Thirty-third and Spruce Streets in Philadelphia, soon after 1925. To the left is Weightman Hall, Franklin Field is in the center, and to the right is The University Museum. (Photo from the University of Pennsylvania Archives.)

These examples of athletics, then, come from diverse cultures in different parts of the world and span a period of several thousands of years (Fig. 4); but still there are, surprisingly enough, a number of common themes that run throughout. For instance, there is some association with religion or religious practices in the evidence for athletics from Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, Etruria and Guatemala. Major athletic facilities were developed for athletic competition in the Greek, Roman and Maya worlds as well as in Philadelphia. In addition, there is among the Greeks, Romans and North American Indians a clear connection between athletics and military preparedness. Athletic competition for women can be clearly attested from the Greek and Roman worlds and can be tentatively suggested for the game of lacrosse as Native Americans knew it. We know that prizes were given to victorious athletes in Mesopotamia,

Greece, Rome, Etruria, and Guatemala, as well as in Philadelphia at the University of Pennsylvania.

The intersection of Thirty-Third and Spruce Streets is, of course, the address and the home of The University Museum. At the same intersection, across the street to the north, is Franklin Field (Fig. 5), the home of University of Pennsylvania athletics and the annual site of the Penn Relays, organized in 1895, the world's oldest and largest relay meet. Franklin Field is one of the most famous stadiums in America today. This close proximity of museum and stadium is an interesting coincidence when one considers the close connection between physical training, athletics, and learning in the ancient Greek world. For it was the Greek gymnasium that was not only the center of athletic training for the youth but also the cultural center of the community and the school. The *gymnasion*, literally "the place of naked people,"

would often include a *palaestra*, "wrestling place," and a *dromos*, "running place," as well as rooms for ballgames, classrooms, and libraries. The stadium, although technically not a part of the gymnasium, was sometimes found nearby.

The Muses were the Greek personifications of poetry, music, and dance, and later all intellectual pursuits. The *museion* in ancient Greece was originally a place associated with the Muses, and at times it was marked by an altar or a temple. Schools were often called "the place of the Muses" or *museion*, and it is known for example that two of the most famous public gymnasia of ancient Athens, Plato's Akademy and Aristotle's Lykeion, each contained a *museion*. Our intersection of Thirty-Third and Spruce Streets and the buildings found here, museum, stadium, gymnasium and *palaestra*, are, therefore, from an historical standpoint appropriately placed. **24**