

Olympic Games Assembly

Welcome to J4's assembly. Make sure you're sitting comfortably and are strapped in tightly because we're travelling back in time to 776 BC and the very first Olympic Games in Ancient Greece.

The Games were held in a village called Olympia and were held as a festival in honour of Zeus, the father of the Gods.

The best athletes from around the Greek world took part and represented their city-states in a variety of sports.

DAY 1:

At the beginning of the festival, all the athletes had to swear an oath in front of a statue of Zeus. They had to swear that they had been in training for 10 months.

Let's meet the teams!

Welcome Sparta!

Spartans are proud and fierce - they are a fighting city-state. They want to win at all costs but are most concerned about beating Athens.

(Spartans come on looking fierce, bow to statue of Zeus and move to one side)

Welcome Athens!

Athenians are a more educated people and very fine and noble. Although they want to beat the Spartans, they would never stoop so low as to lie and cheat to do so.

(Athenians come on noses in the air, bow to statue of Zeus and move to one side)

Welcome Corinth!

Corinthians come from the coast and are practical and productive. They are proud of their honesty but will it help them to win at the Games?

(Corinthians come on smiling, bow to statue of Zeus and move to one side)

Welcome Argos!

No, not the high street chain store, Argos is a difficult area to live in. This means, however, that Argive people are not afraid of the hard work needed to win. They do have a reputation as drama queens though so we shall see!

(Argives come on smiling, waving, blowing kisses and bow to statue of Zeus and move to one side)

On the first day were events in which boys took part.

DAY 2:

The second day began with horse and chariot races. This was the only event that women were allowed to take part in as they were allowed to own horses that raced.

I call all those for the chariot racing! Take your positions please!

(Competitors take their places and jostle for starting position)

On your marks! Go!

And they're off! And look at them go! Oh no – the horse from Argos has refused to start – yet again, they've failed to come up with the goods! But it's a close fight for the lead between Athens and Sparta....look at the Spartan pushing his competitor out of the way – that can't be allowed surely.....and here comes the Corinthian, he's certainly put a spurt on but will he catch the others? 100 yards from the finish and who's it going to be? Athens, Sparta, Athens, Sparta....ooh, it's too close for me to call – what we need is some kind of invention to help us, we could call it the video replay – I'll have to get on to my friend, Archimedes, about that one.

(Sparta victorious, cheers from team, Argives throw a strop at their athlete)

In the afternoon on the second day, the pentathlon took place. The five events were wrestling, running, discus, javelin and the jump.

I call all competitors for the pentathlon! Prepare for the jump!

(bring mat on, competitors line up next to mat)

And first up is Sparta, still glowing from their previous victory....let's see how they get on with this.....(jump)....not bad, not bad.

Can Athens beat that? Can they avenge their previous defeat? Ohhhhh (jump)...yes they can! Fantastic jump!

Next up, Argos. After an appalling start to these Games, can they show us what they are really made of? (jump – very poor) well, I've think they've shown us and it's not very much at all. Poor show.

(Argive competitor leaves crying)

Finally, Corinth. It's a tough jump to beat.....psyching himself up. Here we go.....(jump, winner).....YES! WHAT AN AMAZING JUMP! INCREDIBLE!

(Corinth competitor does a lap of honour while others look on shaking their heads)

DAY 3:

The third day began with an important ceremony involving a sacrifice of oxen to Zeus. Parts of the animals were burned on top of an altar and the rest was then shared out amongst the crowd.

There were also running races, including the sprint, the oldest Olympic event.

I call all sprinters! Take your positions please!

(competitors line up in very intense starting positions)

On your marks! Go!

Athens the favourite for this... and they've made a good start! Argos have also started well but will they be able to keep it up in the long term? It's a close race.....but, as predicted, Argos are fading, they put too much into their start, they've literally run out of puff (Argive runner passes out on floor). So, it's a three man race now...almost at the end and, although Corinth and Sparta are catching up, it looks like Athens will be able to hold them off...and, yes, Athens are victorious this time!

(Athenian competitor congratulated by Corinthian but snubbed by Spartan. Argive manages to get up, mopping brow)

DAY 4:

On day 4, there was an event called the pankration which was like wrestling with no rules. There was also wrestling, with rules, and boxing. The boxers tied leather round their wrists.

I call all competitors for the boxing! Athens versus Sparta and Corinth versus Argos!

Oooh, the ultimate grudge match here between Athens and Sparta! Let's hope they stick to the rules! And let's see if Argos can actually deliver what they've promised us.

Face your opponent! Fight!

And two close fights here! No-one giving an inch! There's a good right hook from Athens, followed up nicely by Sparta. And the Argive competitor is really laying into the Corinthian.....but, look, the other match has degenerated into a brawl between Athens and Sparta....oh, there's too much going on....I can't keep up, I need someone to help me out.....someone involved in the sport who supposedly knows what they're talking about.....we could call them a summariser! (Corinthian lying on floor, Argive victorious) And the Corinthian is beaten, Argos have found something they are good at! And it seems both Athens and Sparta have been disqualified from the competition for not competing in the fair play spirit.

(Athens and Sparta move away, still threatening each other. Corinthian is helped off while Argive attempts a Gwynnie style speech)

(Tearfully) Well, I'd just like to thank my mother and my father and my agent and everyone who's ever known me.....(ushered off weeping)

The final event was a running race wearing soldier's armour and carrying shields. This was to remind competitors that they needed to be successful soldiers.

Competitors ready please! On your marks!

Being a fighting city-state, Sparta are clear favourites for this race and they're beating the rest by miles! It must be hard to run with all that armour on! The rest are making a huge effort but it seems Sparta are unbeatable at this event....and, yes, they've won. Oh fiddlesticks, why did I have to make that bet with my friend? I should know better than to go for the underdog, it's just the romance of the beautiful game that gets to me.....

(Spartan lets out a roar of victory and is congratulated by the other competitors before doing a victory war dance)

DAY 5:

On day five, the events were over and the prizes were given out. The winners were given a crown made from olive branches from the sacred olive tree near the temple of Zeus.

In third place overall, Corinth!

(Corinth competitor comes on, bows and stands to right hand side)

In second place overall, Athens!

(Athenian competitor comes on, bows and stands to left hand side)

And the overall winners, Sparta!

(Spartan comes on, gives another victory roar, bows, is presented with wreath and stands in centre)

Applause from all.

After the presentations, there were celebrations and feasting so even the weaker competitors could enjoy themselves!

(Grandstand music)

The Modern Olympic Games

(speakers come on)

The first modern Olympic Games took place in 1896 in Athens, the capital of Greece. They have been held every 4 years since, apart from during the World Wars and have grown into a massive event with well over 30 sports included. 285 athletes took part in 1896 but this had grown to 10,600 in Barcelona in 1992 and many, many more in Athens last year.

The modern games contain many links and references to the Ancient Games. These include the fact that, during the opening ceremony, the Greek team is always the first to parade out.

(runner acts out marathon, running round hall, collapses on arriving back at front)

The marathon also commemorates a legend that comes from the Ancient Games. A Greek general won and fought a battle against the Persians. He sent an Athenian runner back to Athens with the news. The runner's journey was 24 miles but he reached the city and passed on the news. Unfortunately, he then dropped dead. Thankfully, today's marathon runners are better prepared for running the long distance!

(flame held up)

The Olympic Flame originates from the Ancient Greeks as well. They used a flame lit by the sun's rays at Olympia. These days, the torch is lit at Mount Olympus and carried to the location of the Games by runners who must make sure it doesn't go out.

(flag with Olympic rings held up)

The Olympic Rings are the main symbol of the Games. They symbolise the five continents of the world but no one colour represents an individual continent. Every country that takes part in the Games has one of the colours, including the white background, in its national flag.

The Olympic Creed was written by the founder of the modern Games. It describes the fair play spirit of the Games:

“The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well.”

A rough translation would be to say that it's the taking part that counts.

Last week officials from the International Olympic Committee were in London to examine the city's bid to hold the Games in 2012. They take place on a much larger scale than in 776BC and a lot of building work will have to be done. There will also be some events taking place in unusual locations, for example, the beach volleyball will be held near Buckingham Palace! London is competing against Paris, Moscow, New York but we are believed to have a good chance of winning.

Please bow your heads in thought or prayer.....

Dear Lord,

Thank you that the people of the world can come together and be united through events such as the Olympic Games. Please help us, whether we are taking part in sport or other competitions, to remember the Olympic Creed and that, although it is good to strive to win, it is more important to have taken part and done our best.

Amen.