

Sports

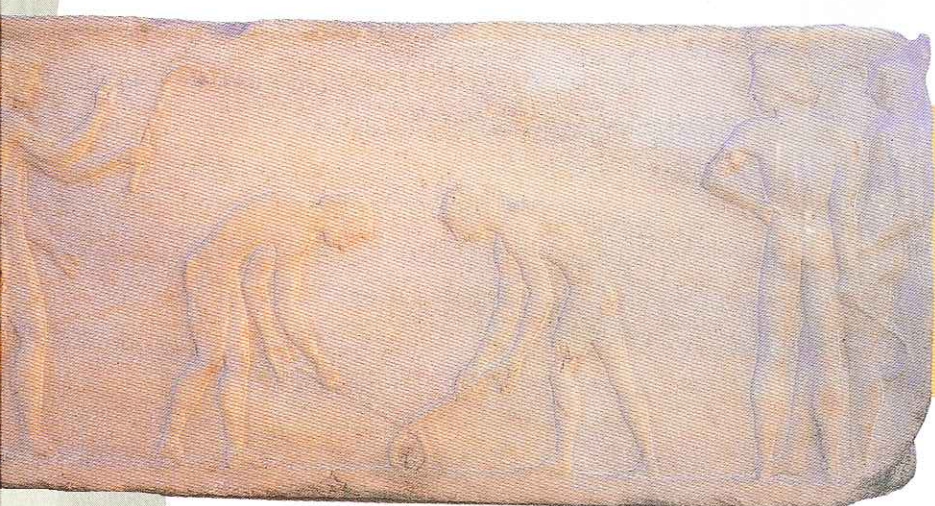
The ancient Greeks took sport very seriously as part of a boy's education and military training. Sport helped boys become the sort of men Greeks admired – tough and competitive but also healthy and graceful. Sport also prepared boys for training as soldiers – encouraging strength, stamina and bravery. Every town had a gymnasium with a running track and wrestling court.

Training and being good at sport was seen as a way of honouring the gods, forming part of major festivals. There were four games – the Olympic, Isthmian, Nemean and Pythian – that drew competitors from the whole Greek world. Winners were clearly favoured by the gods who had helped them to victory. They were rewarded with statues, poems and prizes of cash or olive oil.


Each games meeting had separate competitions for boys aged twelve to seventeen in running, wrestling and boxing. Many fathers coached their sons. Former professional sportsmen became coaches when they retired. It seems that it wasn't unusual for sporting success to run in the family.

Racing

The Greeks raced both horses and horse-drawn **chariots**. Boys as well as men rode as jockeys, without **stirrups**, which were unknown to the Greeks. Boys were chosen because they were lighter than grown men.



This carving shows Greek youths playing a game that looks like hockey.



This is part of the remains of the site where the ancient- Olympic Games were held.

Chariot racing was the highest rated of all sports and one of the most dangerous. Competitors followed an oblong course, about 600 metres long, rounding a post at either end. With no barrier between chariots going in opposite directions, smashes were frequent. On one occasion only the winner finished out of 41 starters! Because chariots and horses were very expensive, racing was only for the wealthy. Ordinary people could only be spectators. The prize for winning went to the chariot's owner, not the driver who had risked his life.

Athletics

Athletic contests included sprints, long distance runs, long jump and throwing the discus or javelin. There were separate contests for girls but only sprint races. Girls wore a **tunic**, unless they were Spartans, who ran naked. Spartan girls were encouraged to play rough sports to toughen themselves for childbirth.

Combat sports

As no equipment was needed, anyone could wrestle, although there were separate competitions for boys. As there were no weight classes heavier, stronger people had an advantage. Punching was banned but breaking fingers was allowed. Wrestlers fought naked but were coated in olive oil. Boxing was less popular (except in Sparta) and even more brutal. Boxers' fists were bound with leather thongs. There were no rounds and fights went on until one fighter gave up or was knocked out.