

The History of the Olympics

The Olympic Games began in ancient times. It is thought that the first Olympic Games took place in 776 BC in Greece as part of an important religious festival. The Games were held in honour of Zeus, king of the gods. They took place every four years at Olympia, a valley in southwest Greece. The name of the valley is where the word 'Olympics' is derived from.



In ancient times, the city-states of Greece were often at war, which made travelling around the country dangerous. Messengers were sent out from Elis, a city near Olympia, to announce a 'sacred truce' lasting one month before the games began. This allowed people from all over Greece to travel to the Olympics in safety. The truce was always honoured because the Olympic Games was a religious festival, so it was considered more important than war.

The first Olympic Games lasted one day and the only event was a short race from one end of the stadium to the other. Gradually more events were added to make four days of competitions. The events included boxing, chariot racing, discus, javelin, long jump and wrestling. Winners were given a wreath of leaves and a hero's welcome back home.

In the ancient games, the Olympic flame was lit and kept at the Altar of Hera, which was near where the Games took place. Since 1936, a Lighting Ceremony has been held at the site of the first Olympic Games. A special torch, forged from silver and inspired by the pillars inside the Temple of Goddess Hera, is used for the flame during the ceremony. To show the flame's purity, it is lit by reflecting the sun's rays with a parabolic mirror, just as it was in ancient times. It remains lit and is taken to the Altar of Hera. The flame is then passed to the first of the torchbearers and a dove is released to signify peace.

In modern times, the torch relay begins with the Lighting Ceremony at the Altar of Hera in Olympia. From here, the torch travels thousands of miles to the host city, passed in a relay by several thousand torchbearers. Each host country creates their own distinct torches, with the designs usually reflecting the culture or significant landmarks of the host country. The final torchbearer brings the flame into the stadium as part of the opening ceremony and has the honour of lighting the cauldron where the flame will burn for the duration of the games.



Since the modern games began in 1896, the Olympics has become a worldwide sporting event. Every four years, for two weeks, millions of people around the world watch the sporting events either in person or on television. Athletes represent their countries and compete against the best of the best. Inspiring future athletes and giving sportspeople worldwide their moment in the spotlight, the Olympics, much like it did in the ancient games, breaks down borders and allows the world to celebrate as one.

