
Innovations in Physical Education: A Re-Enactment of the Ancient Olympic Games

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Teachers today are searching for new approaches to education. Innovation is the word we hear again and again, and it behooves all professionals to examine various innovative techniques in the hope that the learning process might be enhanced. The innovation utilized was a re-enactment of the ancient Olympic Games. The ancient Games were developed in the classroom by lectures and slides, and then the class elected to attempt to re-enact them. A coordinator was put in charge, and each member of the class was assigned a specific task.

The individuals responsible for the events were asked to thoroughly research how they were performed in ancient times, and then endeavored to devise how they could be done by

the class. Their written suggestions were studied by the instructor and the coordinator, and eventually the exact format of that event was agreed upon. The finalized procedures were typed up and handed out to the class, and then athletes and judges were selected for each event. As might be imagined, with men and women in the class, and with a number of limitations such as equipment to consider, there had to be approximations and considerable improvisation to get all the people involved. It was, therefore, not a completely faithful re-enactment - considerable ingenuity occurred. All the events were performed on the same day, though separate days were announced.

Day 1 consisted of the opening ceremonies, the principals dressed in Greek robes borrowed from the Department of Drama. The Chief Judge led, followed by the representative of the Goddess Demeter, a Priestess, the judges and finally the athletes. They strode to an altar, where a sacrifice was offered - in reality a stuffed animal. An oath was given the athletes: "Fellow athletes, repeat after me. I swear that I will use no unfair means to secure victory, and for the past ten months, I have trained in a manner worthy of the festival. I also swear that I am of pure blood Greek heredity. I swear that I will do nothing to disgrace my family's honor."

Day 2 consisted of horse racing, chariot racing and the pentathlon. The horses were human, males being down on all fours, with female riders. A trumpet started the event. Children's wagons, drawn by two people with a charioteer (female) in the back, were utilized in the chariot racing. The pentathlon consisted of the long jump (chlorox bottles filled with sand being used as halteres), the stade run and wrestling.

Day 3 consisted of religious ceremonies, the sacrifice of one hundred oxen, colored balloons being used for the purpose; the dolichos, the diaulos and the stade, the running events; and the hoplite race, football helmets, garbage can lids and field hockey shin guards being used as substitutes for the Greek armour.

Day 4 consisted of boxing, wrestling, and the pankration. Pillows were wrapped around the arms of the boxers to prevent injury. In the pankration, the contestants used football blocking pads on one arm and a pillow on the other.

The ancient Olympic Games ended on Day 5 with a final procession to the altar to award the winning contestant with an olive wreath. A banquet was held in the evening, each person bringing a Greek food.

Although accuracy was not insisted on throughout, the class concluded that it was a worthwhile educational experience, enjoyable as well. It is an interesting innovation for a history class.



The meals were good or was it the company?