

Teaching Sport History: Increasing the Understanding of Ancient Athletics

by

Dale Hart

State University of Brockport

Undergraduate students today are frequently asking for a pragmatic and relevant education. As a teacher of ancient sport history during the early 1970's, I was hard pressed to explain the value of sport history as a part of a liberal arts physical education major. It was even more difficult for me to compete with other professors within the department in making my course experiential as well as relevant.

The "relevancy issue" was not too difficult to rationalize since there are so many lessons to be learned from studying the ancient Greeks and Romans, especially in this day and age. Furthermore, I was convinced that experiential learning would be an important addition to a traditional learning program dominated by lecture and note taking. First, I concentrated in the area of visual aids. I selected and organized various slides, artifacts, and movies to personalize the various units of the sport history course. At times I even asked Students to "get dressed" for class and act out many of the ancient sporting events. Collecting artifacts and constructing models of ancient athletic facilities were also encouraged.

By 1972, I decided to go even farther with the experiential approach. So I designed a course which permitted the students to study the history of Ancient Greek sport at sites where it once thrived. In the spring of 1972, I accompanied thirty-one undergraduate students to Greece where we studied Ancient Greek sports. Over the past four years I have taken approximately 115 undergraduate students to Greece and Italy for the purpose of studying Ancient Greek and Roman sport.

The purpose of this presentation is to (1) discuss the merits of overseas field experiences for undergraduate students of ancient sport history, (2) explain experiences which I have found to be useful to students while in Greece and Italy, (3) present a selection of slides which will illustrate many of the experiences our students have undergone while in Greece and Italy, and (4) discuss how the experiences can make the teacher better informed and perhaps more animated upon her/his return to campus.