

# Women and Sport in Ancient Rome

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The history of Roman women participating in sport parallels the history of Roman women's social progress. In the early republican period, when the authority of the *Pater Familiae* was absolute, women's participation in sport cannot be documented. In the late republican and imperial era, the proof exists that women were involved in athletic competition.

The opportunity for participation in sport by women was the result of a gradual humanizing of the social institution in Rome. For example, in the early republic women had no voice in the choice of a husband. By the first century B.C. it was understood that marriage was a contract which required the free consent of the two concerned. It was in this new social climate that women started to appear on the sport scene. Women attended the baths where they were involved in ball-playing, running the throwing events. Furthermore, women practiced and participated in gladiatorial combats against other women in the arena. Roman women, also, participated in swimming, hunting, and dancing. There is evidence of women participating in acrobatics and *Pente Litha*, a game of skill often used for gambling purposes.

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