
Nemea Revisited

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There were some 140 cities in the Greek world where athletic meetings were known to have been held, but it took until the sixth century B.C. before four “crown” festivals overshadowed all others in importance. There were the Pythian Games, held at Delphi, the Isthmian Games held at Isthmia, the Olympic Games held at Olympia and the Nemean Games held at Nemea.

Recent archeological work conducted at Nemea by the University of California at Berkeley, Stephen Miller being the principle archaeologist, is of considerable significance to the sport historian. Although originally discovered by the Blegens from the University of Cincinnati in 1925, Miller and his coworkers have meticulously, since 1973, conducted a dig in the sanctuary area but, of more significance, in the stadium itself, where particularly from the twelfth century A.D., it has been covered with fill.

The following are important for the sport historian:

- 1 — Approximately one-fourth of the stadium area has been excavated.
- 2 — Bed-rock seating is apparent at one end, unusual in the Greek world.
- 3 — Water channels and settling basins are seen going around the stadium. and the water pipes are clearly visible.
- 4 — The starting sills show the possibility of thirteen athletes competing at the one time.
- 5 — One hundred foot and two hundred foot markers are seen, which would allow the athlete and the spectator to know positions in the race.
- 6 — A judge’s stand and an auxiliary judge’s stand are hypothesized.
- 7 — The starting sills allow for the possibility of a starting device, and fragments in the sanctuary could be parts of that starting mechanism.
- 8 — A single turn post in front of the starting sills offers new evidence on the tun.
- 9 — A vaulted entrance way is to be seen, and bronze fragments allow for the possibility of Zanes.
- 10 — The possibility exists of an earlier stadium in the sanctuary.

Some five personal visitations were made to Nemea before and after the excavation, which added to the examination of the pertinent literature. Slides showing the progression of the evacuation were utilized.