

Methods of Teaching Roman Chariot Racing

DAVID MATZ
Macalester College

I have taught ancient athletics for several years now, and one of the most fascinating units in the course is the one which concerns Roman chariot racing. There are several methods by which the study of Roman chariot racing can be made more interesting and understandable to students.

I base much of my teaching of Roman chariot racing on epigraphical evidence, particularly *CIL* (Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum) 6.10048, a long, detailed inscription on the career of Appuleius Diocles, a driver. A line-by-line analysis of the inscription allows me to introduce and comment upon nearly every important phase of chariot racing.

A second method of teaching Roman chariot racing follows naturally from the discussion of the Diocles inscription. I construct what I call a “charioteering bubblegum card” for Diocles’ career, based on the information derived from *CIL* 6.10048. My hypothetical charioteering bubblegum card follows the format of the ever popular and increasingly valuable baseball bubblegum cards. A baseball card usually contains some statistical information about the career of the player whose picture it bears. Archaeologists have yet to discover any evidence for “charioteer cards” in ancient Rome; however, if such cards had existed, they, too, may have included some statistical information about the careers of athletes like Diocles.

As many of us undoubtedly remember from our youth, the typical baseball bubblegum card usually contained statistics in the following categories: years played, games played, times at bat, runs scored, hits, doubles, triples, homeruns, runs batted in, and batting average. The charioteer bubblegum card follows the same format, with the additional information about how (methods) he won a race. One may then calculate Diocles’ winning percentage and interpolate the true value of Diocles’ winnings.

I think that it is desirable for students to acquire some general knowledge about Latin epigraphy, chiefly because it is such an important primary source, not only for Roman chariot racing, but for Roman civilization in general. I introduce the subject by bringing a large volume of the *CIL* to class, accompanied by the Greek quotation “Mega biblion mega kakon ,” which roughly translated means “A big book is a big pain.” I then explain that there are well over 200,000 extant Latin inscriptions of varying length and on a wide range of subjects, and that sixteen multi-fascicled volumes of *CIL* are necessary to reproduce them. I encourage the students to leaf through the volume after class, or to look at a similar volume in the library, because the *CIL* is an impressive collection of source material, and even if one knows no Latin, he/she can still appreciate the enormous amount of inscriptions available for study and analysis.