

# Nobles and Non-Nobles in Greek Boxing

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There, apparently, were several forms of boxing in the Minoan-Mycenaean world, and judging from the equipment one type was often lethal. Homer's three accounts of boxing suggests that the nobles – the warrior class – enjoyed participating in the sport. It provided them with an opportunity to demonstrate their *arete*, excellence, as warriors. The match between Odysseus and Irus, the beggar, suggests that the lower classes also boxed and that fatalities (Odysseus considered killing Irus) were acceptable.

In 688 B.C. pugilism was added to the Olympic competition, and apparently rules are established to make the sport less brutal. The Greek aristocracy excelled in pugilism as it did in other sports. In the sixth century B.C. non-nobles began to compete as pugilist. Glaucus, a peasant from Carystus, the great boxing champion apparently belongs to this period.

By the end of the sixth century B.C. the Greek nobility showed less enthusiasm for contact sports – particularly boxing and the pancration, but they continued to compete in other athletic events at the great festivals. Successful pugilists were well rewarded and by the Hellenistic period boxers and pancratiasts received the top prize money at many of the festivals. Many pugilists were sons of boxers or related to boxers and it seems that certain families tended to specialize in the sport.