

# SPORT HISTORY: THEORY, METHOD, AND INNOVATION

## Alexander the Great and Sport History: A Reinterpretation

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Alexander the Great is such an important historical figure that within disciplines such as sport history, scholars have sometimes sought to connect him with the subject that they study in order to enhance the discipline's credibility. Within sport history, the sources dealing with Alexander and athletics have often been used indiscriminately. Some scholars have chosen only that evidence which supports their thesis. The result is that some of the biographical traditions and comments associated with Alexander and sport history are erroneous.

Since there have been misinterpretations of the literature and also conflicting theories about Alexander and sport, the primary evidence and the interpretation of that evidence offered by historians regarding Alexander and athletics were examined in the paper. What did the ancient sources say about "sport" and Alexander? What are the issues in sport history for the study of Alexander and athletics? These were two of the problems that were approached in the study.

Our profiles of Alexander as a world unifier, as an impetus for ball games in the western world, and as an adversary of athletes were discussed and critiqued. Then, using only ancient evidence and testimony, alternative explanations of the accounts of Alexander related to these profiles were offered. In addition, Alexander's conscious use of certain festivals to found cities, and the significance of the religious nature of sport to Alexander, were suggested as issues which sport historians could examine further in their studies of Alexander's motivations for organizing contests and games.

The paper attempted to clarify the modern biographical status of Alexander and athletics, and to elaborate on the issues surrounding Alexander the Great and sport history. Sport historians must consider these alternative theories, possibly incorporating them into existing concepts concerning Alexander the Great.