

## The Olympic Games

In ancient Greece athletic festivals were very important and had strong religious associations. The Olympian athletic festival, held every four years in honour of Zeus, eventually lost its local character, became first a national event, and then, after the rules against foreign competitors had been waived, international. No one knows exactly how far back the Olympic Games go, but some official records date from 776 B.C.

5

The Games took place in August on the plain by Mount Olympus. Many thousands of spectators gathered from all parts of Greece, but no married woman was admitted even as a spectator. Slaves, women and dishonoured persons were not allowed to compete. The exact sequence of events is uncertain, but events included boys' gymnastics, horse-racing, field events such as discus and javelin throwing, and the very important foot races. There was also boxing and wrestling and special tests of varied ability such as the pentathlon, the winner of which excelled in running, jumping, discus and javelin throwing and wrestling. The evening of the third day was devoted to sacrificial offerings to the heroes of the day, and the fourth day, that of the full moon, was set aside as a holy day.

10

15

On the sixth and last day, all the victors were crowned with holy garlands of wild olive from a sacred wood. So great was the honour that the winner of the foot race gave his name to the year of his victory. Although Olympic winners received no prize money, they were, in fact, richly rewarded by their state authorities. The public honour also made the strict discipline of the ten-month training period worthwhile. In spite of the lengthy training, however, runners were known to drop dead from strain at the winning post. How their results compared with modern standards, we unfortunately have no means of telling.

20

25

After an uninterrupted history of almost 1,200 years, the Games were abolished in A.D. 394, the Christian era, because of their pagan origin. It was over 1,500 years before there was another such international athletics gathering. The Greek institution was revived in 1896 and the first small meeting took place in Athens. After the 1908 London Olympics, success was re-established and nations sent their best representatives. In times of peace, the Games have taken place ever since at four-yearly intervals. In Munich in 1972, competitors from more than 120 countries were watched by huge crowds.

30

35

Nowadays, the Games are held in different countries in turn. The host country provides vast facilities, including a stadium, swimming pools and living accommodation, but competing countries pay their own athletes'

expenses. Athletic contests are still the main feature, but now many more sports are represented, women compete, the ancient pentathlon, for example, has been modified into a more comprehensive test, and the marathon\* races, initiated in 1896, are now a celebrated event. 40

The Olympics start with the arrival in the stadium of a torch, lighted on Mount Olympus by the sun's rays. It is carried by a succession of runners to the stadium. The torch symbolizes the continuation of the ancient Greek athletic ideals, and it burns throughout the Games until the closing ceremony. The well-known Olympic flag, however, is a modern conception: the five interlocking rings symbolize the uniting of all five continents participating in the Games. 45

### Ideas

Decide which answer best completes the following statements according to the information in the passage.

- 1 The first Olympic Games took place
  - a) in the seventh century A.D.
  - b) certainly before 700 B.C.
  - c) over three thousand years ago.
  - d) a thousand years ago.
- 2 In the final stages of the ancient Olympic Games, any competitor had to be
  - a) Greek.
  - b) male.
  - c) unmarried.
  - d) neither a slave nor a foreigner.
- 3 The order of athletic events at the ancient Olympics
  - a) has not definitely been established.
  - b) varied according to the full moon.
  - c) was decided by Zeus, in whose honour the Games were held.
  - d) was considered unimportant.
- 4 During the Games, on the evening before the moon was full,
  - a) heroes were sacrificed to Zeus.
  - b) large sums of prize money were distributed to the heroes.
  - c) all the victors were crowned with garlands.
  - d) the heroes were honoured with sacrificial offerings.
- 5 Competitors had to train
  - a) for four years.
  - b) for ten months.
  - c) until they collapsed exhausted.
  - d) for periods determined by their state authorities.

\* *marathon*: longest running race of all – about 42 kilometres (26 miles) in length.



- 6 Modern athletes' results cannot be compared with those of the ancient runners because
- a) details such as times were not recorded in the past.
  - b) they are much better.
  - c) the ancient runners fell down dead.
  - d) the Greeks had no means of telling the time.
- 7 The continuity of the Olympic Games
- a) was broken in the year A.D. 1200.
  - b) has never been broken.
  - c) was interrupted for over 1,500 years.
  - d) was broken in 1896.
- 8 Nowadays, the athletes' expenses are paid for
- a) out of the national funds of competing nations.
  - b) out of the prize money of the winners.
  - c) by the athletes themselves.
  - d) by commercial organizations.
- 9 At the beginning of the Games in the host country
- a) a torch is ignited at sunrise.
  - b) a lighted torch is brought into the stadium.
  - c) relays of runners light their torches in the stadium.
  - d) a torch is ignited by the Greek ambassador.
- 10 The modern Olympics compared with the ancient ones are
- a) inspired by the same ideals.
  - b) completely different in every respect.
  - c) more restricted in the variety of events.
  - d) too much concerned with international rivalry.

### Vocabulary

Find the following words in the passage and select the meaning you think is *most likely* to correspond among the choices given.

- |                                |                              |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 <i>waived</i> (line 5)       | 3 <i>sacred</i> (line 19)    |
| a) accepted                    | a) picturesque               |
| b) shaken                      | b) of religious significance |
| c) abolished                   | c) frightened                |
| d) displayed                   | d) carved with a knife       |
| 2 <i>excelled in</i> (line 14) | 4 <i>rewarded</i> (line 22)  |
| a) was best overall at         | a) paid                      |
| b) chose between               | b) prized                    |
| c) was excessive in            | c) gifted                    |
| d) was restricted to           | d) valued                    |

5 *pagan* (line 28)

- a) evil
- b) irreligious
- c) heathen
- d) pageant-like

6 *institution* (line 30)

- a) museum
- b) custom
- c) school
- d) building

7 *facilities* (line 37)

- a) opportunities
- b) buildings and equipment
- c) entertainments
- d) faculties

8 *initiated* (line 42)

- a) run
- b) continued
- c) begun
- d) accepted into adulthood

9 *conception* (line 48)

- a) birth
- b) beginning
- c) idea
- d) instrument

10 *interlocking* (line 48)

- a) linked
- b) international
- c) doubled
- d) touching

**Similar or different?**

Say whether or not the statement is similar in meaning to the sentence from the passage indicated by the line number in brackets.

- 1 We can ascertain when the Olympic Games first took place because official records date from 776 B.C. (lines 5-6)
- 2 Originally the only permitted competitors were those whose position in society was respected. (lines 9-10)
- 3 Because the ten-month period of training was so strenuous, competitors who did not achieve success felt that their efforts were wasted. (lines 22-23)
- 4 The intensive training gave all runners the strength to withstand even the strain of the great races. (lines 23-25)
- 5 As there is a greater variety of sports nowadays, athletic events have lost their importance. (lines 39-40)
- 6 The Olympic torch burns throughout the Games to honour today the ancient Greek athletic ideals. (lines 45-46)