

The traditional date for the foundation of the Olympic games was 776 B.C., some 2,751 years ago. Originally the competition was strictly local, and only the folk who lived in and around the territory of Elis in the north west Peloponnese participated. At first there was only a single event, the 210 yard dash. As a measurement the Greeks referred to 210 yards as a "STADION" (STADIUM in Latin), hence the term began to apply to the race and later to the race course of the same length. As time went by the games began to achieve a growing popularity throughout the entire Peloponnese; indeed, many of the early winners were from Sparta where physical culture was practiced almost to the exclusion of other arts. By the 5th Century Greeks everywhere eagerly entered the games.

Naturally the games became more varied as time went on. To the simple foot race was added a double race in which the runner had to run to one end of course, round a goal post, and return to the start line (about a 1/4 mile distance). A long distance race of 2 or 3 miles was further added, the "DOLICHOS", but a Marathon race of 25 miles was not a part of the ancient tradition. To win the "PENTATHLON" one had to score high in five separate events. The best two in standing broad jump, running, discus throwing, and javelin hurling would be matched in a wrestling contest with winner take all in this five-fold pentathlon competition. Boxing and wrestling were done separately and in a free combative style of fighting called "PANKRATION" where almost anything except biting and eye-gouging was allowed to secure victory. One of the most spectacular events was the horse racing, especially with four-horse and later, after 408 B.C., two horse chariots. This competition was a special favorite of the rich who won a prize if their horses came in first, but who did not have to drive their own carts. Special events such as a race in full armour, trumpet competitions, and a yelling contest between heralds added variety and lightness to the athletic menu.

Only Greeks were allowed at the games and they eventually came from all over the Greek mainland, Sicily, Italy, the islands of the Aegean and the coast of Turkey to compete. Absolutely no women were allowed in the sacred game enclosure at Olympia, the "ALTIS", on pain of death while the games were going on. The whole purpose of the games was to pay honour to Zeus by a display of human excellence laid before the god as a sort of sacrifice of valour. An olive-crown (not even a gold medal which lasts somewhat longer) was the only physical prize, but the real prize was "KUDOS", undying fame: fame to enhance a man's reputation for a lifetime and more and bring glory to his native city-state. Under the influence of Christianity the pagan games, which in time degenerated and became professionalized, were abolished in 393 A.D. only to be revived in Athens in 1896 and held to this year, with certain interruptions, at an interval of four years according to ancient custom. Canada thus inherits a fine and noble tradition which could serve to elevate and unify the participants, DEO VOLENTE.