



Athletics

Athletics was contested in the first ancient Olympic Games, and champions have been recorded from as far back as 776 BC.

First and original

Throughout recorded sports history, athletics has always been practised. The first event contested in the ancient Olympic Games was the "stadium" race, a sprint of about 192 metres. Winners in this event have been recorded from as far back as 776 BC.

Ancient events

Much like today, the ancient Olympic Games included a wide variety of track and field events. Such events included longer foot races, a race in armour, and a pentathlon event that consisted of the "stadium" race, long jump, discus throw, javelin throw and wrestling.

Across the globe

Similar events were held in ancient Greece at the Isthmian, Nemean and Pythian Games. Throughout Europe, local fairs and festivals often included running, jumping and throwing events. In Ireland and Scotland, these developed into organised sets of Tailteann and Highland Games, respectively. There was also a tradition of "pedestrian" events – often with heavy betting involved – in the 18th and 19 centuries, especially in Great Britain, which normally involved walking or running races.

Modern organisation

The modern format of athletics, in which a variety of running, jumping, throwing, walking and combined events are competed at a single "meeting" or "meet", evolved in the late 19th century, when schools and military colleges began to incorporate sports and exercise as part of education programmes. The earliest recorded meeting dates back to 1840 in Shropshire, England, but specialised championships began to thrive in the 1880s in the USA, UK, and throughout Europe, as well as in other developed nations.

Since 1986

Following the inclusion of athletics at the first modern Olympic Games in 1896 and the creation of the IAAF in 1912, athletics has grown steadily in global reach and popularity. Key milestones have been the inclusion of women's events in the Olympic Games (as from 1928) and the rise of "developing countries" in athletics, starting in the 1960s, involving, in particular, distance runners from Africa and sprinters from the Caribbean region. More recently, top athletes have begun to emerge from Asia. At the last Olympic Games in Beijing, athletes from no fewer than 62 nations reached finals in athletics.

For more information please refer to IOC official website