



Sport in Ancient Times

Nigel B. Crowther

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A lively survey encompassing the Orient, the Americas, and the classical world

From the Olympic Games of Greece to the gladiatorial contests of Rome, sport in the ancient world was fiercely competitive and included a wider range of physical contests than we moderns might suspect. The early Chinese played forms of polo and golf, while half a world away, Hohokam and Maya Indians enjoyed team ball games.

Nigel Crowther, a leading authority on classical Greek sport, here casts his net over the entire ancient world to reveal the variety, and often the intensity, of sport in earlier times, from 3000 b.c.e. to the Middle Ages. Taking in twenty premodern societies on five continents—with particular emphasis on ancient Greece and Rome and the Byzantine Empire—he traces connections to modern sporting attitudes, practices, and institutions as he describes how athletics figured in cultural arenas that extended beyond physical prowess to ritual, social status, military associations, and politics.

Crowther takes us back to the birth of sumo wrestling in Japan and describes the sports of the Sumerians and Hittites. He documents bull leaping and boxing as recorded on pottery in Crete, as well as running and archery as practiced by the pharaohs in Egypt. He shows the significance of the early Olympic Games, describes the Romans' use of gladiatorial contests for political ends, and analyzes the influence of Byzantine chariot racing on society. He also notes the changing role of women in ancient sports—from their prominence in Egyptian contests, to the mythological Atalanta, to female Roman gladiators.

As informative as it is entertaining, *Sport in Ancient Times* opens new vistas for general readers, students, and sport historians. It offers a broad look at ancient sport and will enrich readers' appreciation of games they enjoy today.

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