**THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT**

* The Olympic Games, which originated in ancient Greece as many as 3,000 years ago, were revived in the late 19th century and have become the world’s preeminent sporting competition.
* From the 8th century B.C. to the 4th century A.D., the Games were held every four years in Olympia, located in the western Peloponnese peninsula, in honor of the god Zeus.
* The Olympic Games were held to be one of the two central rituals in ancient Greece, the other being the much older religious festival, the Eleusinian mysteries.
* To the Greeks, it was important to root the Olympic Games in mythology. During the time of the ancient games their origins were attributed to the gods, and competing legends persisted as to who actually was responsible for the genesis of the games.
* The ancient Olympic Games were originally a festival or celebration of and for Zeus; later, events such as a footrace, a javelin contest, and wrestling matches were added. The Olympic Games were a series of athletic competitions among representatives of city-states and one of the Panhellenic Games of ancient Greece. They were held in honor of Zeus, and the Greeks gave them a mythological origin. The first Olympics is traditionally dated to 776 BC.
* They continued to be celebrated when Greece came under Roman rule, until the emperor Theodosius I suppressed them in AD 393 as part of the campaign to impose Christianity as the State religion of Rome. The games were held every four years.
* During the celebration of the games, an Olympic Truce was enacted so that athletes could travel from their cities to the games in safety. The prizes for the victors were olive leaf wreaths or crowns. The games became a political tool used by city-states to assert dominance over their rivals. Politicians would announce political alliances at the games, and in times of war, priests would offer sacrifices to the gods for victory.
* The games were also used to help spread Hellenistic culture throughout the Mediterranean. The Olympics also featured religious celebrations. The statue of Zeus at Olympia was counted as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Sculptors and poets would congregate each Olympiad to display their works of art to would-be patrons.
* The ancient Olympics had fewer events than the modern games, and only freeborn Greek men were allowed to participate, although there were victorious women chariot owners.
* The first modern Olympics took place in 1896 in Athens, and featured 280 participants from 13 nations, competing in 43 events.
* Since 1994, the summer and Winter Olympic Games have been held separately and have alternated every two years.
* The first recorded evidence of the ancient Olympic Games can be traced back to 776 B.C. The ancient games were dedicated to the Olympian gods and were held on the plains of Olympia in the western part of the Peloponnese.
* Initially, the games had only one event: the “stadion” foot-race. Coroebus of Elis, a Greek cook, was the first recorded winner of the contest in 776 B.C., according to historical records.
* The ancient games were closely linked to the religious festivals of the cult (devotion directed towards a particular figure or object) of Zeus, and Olympia became a central site for the worship of the king of the Olympian gods. The games continued for nearly 12 centuries until Roman emperor Theodosius banned them in 393 A.D.