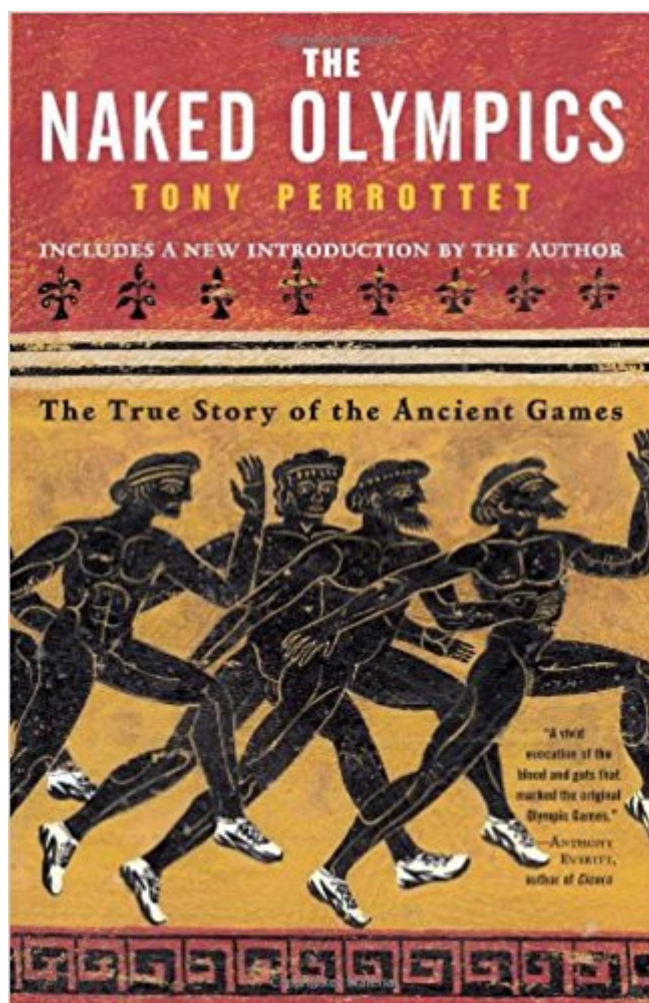


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# The Naked Olympics: The True Story Of The Ancient Games



## Synopsis

What was it like to attend the ancient Olympic Games? With the summer Olympics' return to Athens, Tony Perrottet delves into the ancient world and lets the Greek Games begin again. The acclaimed author of *Pagan Holiday* brings attitude, erudition, and humor to the fascinating story of the original Olympic festival, tracking the event day by day to re-create the experience in all its compelling spectacle. Using firsthand reports and little-known sources—including an actual Handbook for a Sports Coach used by the Greeks—The Naked Olympics creates a vivid picture of an extravaganza performed before as many as forty thousand people, featuring contests as timeless as the javelin throw and as exotic as the chariot race. Peeling away the layers of myth, Perrottet lays bare the ancient sporting experience—including the round-the-clock bacchanal inside the tents of the Olympic Village, the all-male nude workouts under the statue of Eros, and history's first corruption scandals involving athletes. Featuring sometimes scandalous cameos by sports enthusiasts Plato, Socrates, and Herodotus, *The Naked Olympics* offers essential insight into today's Games and an unforgettable guide to the world's first and most influential athletic festival. "Just in time for the modern Olympic games to return to Greece this summer for the first time in more than a century, Tony Perrottet offers up a diverting primer on the Olympics of the ancient kind. Well researched; his sources are as solid as sources come. It's also well written. Perhaps no book of the season will show us so briefly and entertainingly just how complete is our inheritance from the Greeks, vulgarity and all."--The Washington Post

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Combining a wealth of vivid details with a knack for narrative pacing and subtle humor, Perrottet (*Pagan Holiday*) renders a striking portrayal of the Greek Olympics and their role in the ancient world. While our modern games certainly pay homage to the Greek festival that was held uninterrupted for more than 1,200 years, the book's title refers to the most pronounced difference between the two: Ancient athletes competed in the nude, adorned only with olive oil. While Perrottet also outlines events ranging from the merciless chariot races to the pankration—a sort of early predecessor of ultimate fighting in which strangulation was seen as the surest means of attaining victory—he also puts the games in their heavy religious context and gives readers a strong sense of what they were like from a spectator's point of view. That they were cramped, hot and dizzyingly unsanitary apparently did little to dissuade throngs of people from the often treacherous journey to Olympia to catch glimpses of their heroes. And their experiences provided by Perrottet are what separate this book from staid history. His goal, he writes at the outset, is "to create the ancient games in their sprawling, human entirety," so readers are treated not only to a thorough picture of the games' proceedings but also to glimpses of the shameless bacchanalia, numerous (and often lascivious) entertainments and even corruption that accompanied them. It's an entertaining, edifying account that puts a human face on one of humanity's most remarkable spectacles. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

This lively account of the classical Olympics portrays them as "the Woodstock of antiquity," and claims that the Games, while taken seriously, were also where Greeks gathered for a five-day debauch. A prostitute could earn a year's wages in the course of the tournament, Thessalonian peddlers sold love potions made from horse's sweat and minced lizard, and pentathletes competed to the accompaniment of flutes, perhaps the ancient equivalent of stadium rock. The festival offered beauty pageants and Homer-recitation contests, numerologists and fire-swallowers, and such culinary delicacies as roasted sow's womb. Athletic events also fuelled a thriving pickup scene: a message etched into the wall of a stadium at Nemea reads, "Look up Moschos in Philippi—he's cute." Copyright © 2005 The New Yorker

"... there was no reliable water supply at Olympia ... so dehydrated spectators would be collapsing in droves from heatstroke. Nobody bathed for days. The sharp odor of sweat did battle with Olympia's fragrant pine forests and wildflowers, only to be overpowered by the intermittent wafts from the dry riverbeds, which had been turned into open-air latrines. And every minute of the day was a trial with

Olympia's incessant plague of flies ... The smoke from thousands of cooking fires created a pall of pollution. Crowd control was enforced by local officials with whips." - from THE NAKED OLYMPICS, on the conditions facing the spectators. Perhaps could also describe the ambience surrounding modern-day after-Christmas sales. With THE NAKED GAMES, author Tony Perrottet repeats what he previously did with *Pagan Holiday: On the Trail of Ancient Roman Tourists*, i.e. take the reader back to the good old days. In this volume, Tony describes, based on relatively meager and scattered historical sources, what it was like to attend, either as a spectator or an athlete, the original Greek Olympic Games, which were uninterruptedly staged every four years from 776 B.C. to 394 A.D. That's 1,170 years, a performance run that Broadway productions can only fantasize about. Some rocks don't live that long. My pre-existing knowledge of the Greek games and Olympia being, well, nil, the only errors apparent to me were in an artist's re-creation of the forty-foot high statue of Zeus within his Olympia temple. The drawing of the idol is wildly out of proportion, based on measurements provided in the historical record, to the human figures alongside. Moreover, Tony's text places a scepter in his right hand and a winged statue of Victory in his left while, in the drawing, it's just the opposite. Didn't anyone proof-read? The volume contains thirty-one illustrations, most of which show the contestants' activities as depicted on drinking cups, amphorae, and water jars of the period. Not surprisingly, pretty much all of the subjects are buck naked, which is how they competed and which is consistent with the book's title. I wish I'd had the sunscreen concession. There's also a drawing of what the Sanctuary of Olympia complex may have looked like around 150 B.C. based on extant ruins and archeological evidence. There is, however, no placement of Olympia on a map; it was rather isolated from the rest of Greece. I had to look it up on-line. Finally, there's a scene from the film *Ben Hur* (1959) that shows the title character racing his 4-horse chariot. Perrottet maintains that the film's race sequence, and action sequences like it in other movies, accurately portrays the chaotic and violent nature of the event as it was staged at the Greek games. Really? I didn't realize Charlton Heston was that old. As a work of popular history, THE NAKED GAMES is almost certainly not the most learned or comprehensive work on the subject. But for anyone with a casual interest in a wide range of topics, this book, assuming Perrottet is reporting the facts with reasonable accuracy, is a congenial and instructive diversion.

While this book is informative and entertaining, it leaves out some interesting details of the ancient games that I have read about in other books, and I am not sure this author fully understands how to write about cultures different from his own. I would buy it again, though, because it does relate

events in a way that makes you feel as though you were there.

"The Naked Olympics: The True Story of the Ancient Games" by Tony Perrottet is a wonderful book describing the ancient Greek games. It's aptly titled, too, in two different ways. First, in the ancient Olympics, the contestants performed nude, without clothing that would prevent spectators from admiring their glorious physiques. But more importantly, Perrottet lifts the respectable veneer that is so often draped over classical times. Many writers have difficulties describing the past. Either they write with such awe that the ancients seem to have been gods, instead of mortals, or the writers write in such a way that we seem to be viewing through a dust-covered lens that makes everything seem old and faded. Perrottet, though, brings the past alive in a way that makes the reader see and hear and even taste, feel and smell - especially smell! - what it was like to participate in these ancient games. Through a variety of different ancient sources, including contemporary texts, vase paintings, statues and a visit to the ruins of Olympia, he is able to give us a well-rounded experience. He guides us through the importance of the games in honoring the gods, how athletes trained, including specific, faddish diets that they followed, the evolution of the different events, the role that women played (unfortunately very little), the discomfort felt by the crowds, and even how physicians treated injuries. "The Naked Olympics" is great fun, and even though the Olympics are not being held in Athens this year, it's worth reading this book to appreciate them wherever they take place (the winter Olympics are taking place in Turin, Italy in 2006).

If you're interested in what the original Olympics were really like, read this book. Written in a "non-scholarly" style, this book really takes you back to the start of it all, without leaving behind modern (and contemporary) sensibilities. A tradition that lasted almost 1,200 years, brought back to modernity by scholars - everyone should educate themselves about this subject. And this is the book that will do it.

This is a terrific book that describes the ancient games and the athletes' training methods. It clears up myths about amateurism in ancient athletes and describes their rigorous lifestyle. I highly recommend this book.

Required for daughter's school. Good condition

as expected great seller

It was an interesting read. I like the way the author utilized research to tell a story, while imagining what it would really look like. Also, the occasional connect to modern Olympics made the reader think about today's sport along with the origin of sport. It made history fun!

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