

THE HISTORY OF PENTATHLON COMPETITIONS

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Abstract: *The Pentathlon is a combined athletic discipline of the ancient Olympic Games. A detailed exploration of the ancient Olympic competitions in general and of the pentathlon, in particular, allow us to discover 1200 years of sport history. The spectacle of the pentathlon contest, the method of determining a winner, the order of the five disciplines is simply fascinating. The modern Olympic Games redefined the pentathlon among the Olympic disciplines. Under the name of the modern pentathlon, it gradually regained its fame won in antiquity. The military pentathlon is a variant of the modern pentathlon deployed within the military organization and is considered the king of military sports. The evolution of the modern battlefield, strongly influenced by the modern combat technique, will surely change the pentathlon contest register. Even if respect for the Olympic spirit is desired, the pentathlon must take into account the evolution of the contemporary society to keep its attractiveness.*

Keywords: pentathlon, ancient, mythology, history, sports, military

1. Introduction

The term pentathlon comes from Greek, where the word "Penta" = five and "Athlon" = competition. Pentathlon (Greek = πένταθλον) is an ancient athletic competition consisting of five disciplines. Present at the ancient Olympic Games starting with the 18th edition, the pentathlon is the first combined athletic discipline in history. The five disciplines of the pentathlon are: javelin, discus, long jump, running and wrestling. In my presentation, I will use the term pentathlon for the athletic race in the ancient period. The terms of modern pentathlon, military, aeronautical and naval pentathlon for sporting competitions in the modern period. The word "sport" is a term in the modern period that clearly defines organized physical movement. The first edition of the ancient Olympic Games took place in Greece in Athens in 776 BC [6]. For 12 centuries, the Olympic Games was in

operation. It is a record of longevity in the history of mankind, and Greece is proud of this trophy. Each edition of these athletic races took place under the patronage of a God. Hercules, the son of Zeus, would have built the first stadium in his father's name [1]. After completion, Hercules set the length over which the athletes had to compete against each other of 400 steps in the stadium, respectively 192.27 meters. This distance would be the first and only athletic race for the next 13 Olympics. "Dromos" or the stadium race is won at the first edition of the Olympics by a cook named Korebos [5]. The victory was dedicated to Hercules, and Korebos was proclaimed "eponymous." The name of the Olympics was given by its winner. The term Olympiad defined not the festivity itself but the interval between two Olympic Games, respectively 4 years. About 40,000 spectators attended the stadium at these first athletic races in

ancient Greece. Though it was hard to believe this number of spectators, the spectacle of the Olympic Games was impressive. The institution of the ancient Olympic Games is interesting, impressive and also a "mandatory" addition to mythology and reality. During the classical antiquity, there has been an evolution of society, especially in the cultural-artistic field. Certainly, the ancient Olympic Games has occupied a place of honor in ancient society. Most of the important historical documents relating to these Olympic races have been altered during the Roman Empire. Finally, Roman Emperor Theodosius I proclaimed the ancient contests as pagan rituals, recommending their prohibition. After 1200 years of tradition, the ancient Olympic Games have been forcibly shut [5]. Thus a valuable work of humanity had been lost. Many questions about the organization and unfolding of ancient races remain open. Pentathlon is a special case due to its complexity and lack of conclusive historical information.

2. How the pentathlon race was born

Mythology presents the pentathlon as a beautiful story that began somewhere on the Argonauts ship before the Trojan War. Argonauts were Greek sailors on their boats called Argo. They were in a military expedition to the place called "Golden Fleece"[1]. Jason's expedition commander used to run athletic races among sailors. Apparently, a friend of his, Peleus, suggested the idea of gathering five samples in one race to see who is the best athlete in all disciplines. That's how the pentathlon was born. Thus, Peleus winning the race, becoming the master or model of the perfect athlete. The founder claims that Peleus won the first pentathlon in the year 1225, that is, in the famous Argonauts stop on the island of Lemnos. Today, it is said that the inhabitants of this island are proud of claiming they are the descendants of King Jason - even if he was king of Iolkos, in Thessalia - as the "inventor" of

the pentathlon. An interesting point is that the pentathlonists were not the most valuable athletes of the ancient Olympic Games [8]. Plato argues that the pentathlon was an opportunity for second-hand athletes from the established disciplines: running, fighting, disc throwing, etc. to be able to affirm [1]. Having in mind the speculations pentathlon is a demanding athletic discipline. The paintings on clay pots, the statues of the pentathlon winning bodies alongside the passages in the works of ancient writers demonstrate that the pentathlon has existed since antiquity. Among the most important written sources are the works of poets Pindar and Bacchylides. Although often mentioned in the history books of the ancient Olympics, Philostratus has pleasant work that goes beyond the limits of reality. Other important sources are the Pausanias diary and the statues of the winners at the pentathlon of Olympia [1]. Unfortunately, no complete list of the winners of the Olympiads has survived until nowadays. The pentathlon, as well as the other athletic disciplines, is written about by metaphorical writers, somewhere at the end of their works. Another example is the work of Eusebius which states the existence of the pentathlon competition in Elis, Sparta and other major cities in Greece. So the pentathlon has been running since 708 BC. For almost 1,200 years in ancient Greece at the original Olympic Games. This is the first combined athletic race in history [7].

3. The pentathlon competition

The pentathlon race was held over different athletic categories. Participant athletes could pass to the next race only if they completed the previous one. Assumptions regarding the organization, unfolding and appointing the pentathlon winner, is not clear and many due to lack of archaeological evidence. There are several assumptions on the number of participants and the day of the contest. Looking at the order of events it was decided and accepted that out of the five races the last one was

the fight in the ring. This reduces from 120 to 24 the possibilities of determining the order of evidence [1]. The fight was the last competition and the other four, after all, didn't matter anymore. The problem was solved when the run was classified as the fourth in the event, so throwing the disc and the spear were delimited by the long jump. Specialists have taken into account in the presentations made both by the small historical evidence and the factors that are related to the sustained physical effort within the combined samples. Only a combination of these factors could help to better assess the course of events. It cannot be said, however, that all the pentathlon competitions were identical. The ancient Olympics have developed from one edition to the next and the pentathlon competitions have evolved similarly [1]. As with the other evidence, the pentathlon was supervised by the referees. They had a stick in their hand. If the rules were broken, the bat hit the earth. Besides the referees, there were the flute singers responsible for timing. The contestants had to finish their execution while interpreting a verse. The number of competitors is still a mystery. It is supposedly due to the 21 lines on the Olympia stadium that this was the maximum number of competitors. There are, however, several variants. I would consider, especially for the pentathlon at the first editions, the version presented by Joachim Ebert[5]. He proposes the number "magic 5" as the maximum number of competitors to the pentathlon test. Starting from this idea, things are simplified. He brings plausible justifications in favor of his theory. Simplicity, fairness, safety, etc. The number of competitors and the number of attempts on each sample are very important in drawing up a winning system. Any participant in the ancient Olympic Games had to compete for a month before the start. There, inside the "gymnasium", the athletes continued their training in an organized and supervised manner. Ten months before the start of the Olympic Games, selected

athletes were visited by inspectors from the organizers. They checked whether the athletes followed the training programs. For an athlete preparing 5 disciplines was a sustained physical, material and financial effort. The athletes came from wealthy families who could afford such. The pentathlon athlete has to run very well, it has to jump and throw very well and be familiar with fighting techniques. That's why it was difficult to be a pentathlon athlete [2]. Athletes and coaches were specializing in battles or running but it wasn't easy for athletes and coaches to specialize in all five disciplines. The Greeks, through Homer's poems, have defined the pentathlon athlete as the "perfect athlete". Thanks to the existence of pentathlon, the spear and disc throwing and jumping in length become events. Five systems have been developed to appoint the pentathlon winner. Of these systems, they are clearly distinguished two of them, but this does not invalidate the possibility of the other three. The first system is based on Moretti-Petrucco's points [11][12]. They came to the conclusion that the most appropriate system is on points because it is the simplest. The system is based on the points assembled by the athlete to each discipline. The winner was the one who had the most points after five. It is a simple system but for those in the stands, it was boring if the number of competitors was more than five. The second is N. Suppanz's logical evaluation system, which seems to be optimal having all the factors considered [13]. None of the texts interpreted so far contradict it. It's easy and logical. It is also fair and does not take into account the order of the disciplines, it does not bother the public, it is not bureaucratic and can offer event two winners [10].

4. Modern Pentathlon

The modern pentathlon has, like almost any sports discipline, its own legend. Sweden, the country where the snow pile up forced the knights to keep their swords in their sheath is where the pentathlon will be

reborn. The legend says: "A military rider started a journey to deliver a message of great importance. After a few miles of gallop, a lancer from the enemy camp pierced his horse, the rider preparing for his own death. Only he immediately stood up and defeated the enemy after a short duel with the sword. He continued his walk through the forest, and at some point, he heard a bullet whistling in his ear. After a few moments, he pulled out his gun and fired into the aggressor who was preparing to attack him again. Eliminating his opponent, the soldier continued his journey, got out of the woods, but there was water that he must cross. His camp was visible. He did not think twice. He threw himself into the water and swam in it. When he got out of the water, he felt a 10-kilogram bag on his back with his wet clothes. He started running. He felt a lot of fatigue. He tried to get rid of some of his military gear, but there was no time. He continued to run and reached, exhausted, his camp, with the intact message he had held during the crossing of the water "[4]. This is the legend from which the modern pentathlon would have been born. It is assumed that the soldier was Sven Thofelt, Brigadier General, the first president of the International Federation of Modern Pentathlon. Sweden 1912 is the year of the official rebirth of the pentathlon. Baron Coubertin has seen another dream come true. Until 1936 when a German pentathlon champion appeared on the list, all the Olympic champions were Swedish. Swedes Lilliehöök, Dryssen, Lindman, Thofelt, Oxenstierna, Grutt and Hall will write history for several editions. After Hall, however, the narrow pentathlon of the modern pentathlon appears, the Soviet and Hungarian athletes who will make history in this discipline. Hungary has an impressive record of the modern pentathlon and still leads to the winning medals won by both the nation and the individual. Andras Balczó is considered the greatest champion of modern pentathlon. His results will always be a source of comparison for

athletes [15]. The modern pentathlon is named to make a clear distinction from the ancient pentathlon, which is, in fact, one of the wishes of the founder of the modern Olympic Games. The evidence has changed, taking into account the news and requirements on the battlefield. Throwing spear is no longer used, being replaced by pulling, the long jump has turned into riding obstacles, the swim took place on the disk and the fighting turned into sword fighting. Running is the only one remaining, but the distance you run is different. The evolution of the pentathlon over time is natural and keeps up with what the sporting phenomenon means today. It is not a cheap sport and a wide public outlet, the changes brought about by the regulation almost imposed by themselves. Today is a laser gun and a modern pentathlon contest is held in one day, as in antiquity. The famous Romanian sports journalist Ioan Chirila stressed that: "The modern pentathlon is a sport in which spectators run too." It is a sport in which the spectators are in tandem with the athletes who run from the fencing room to the swimming pool and from here on the track, then to the shooting and running polygons. Preparing as an athlete in such a competition is Spartan in its way. The material, financial, medical, and training conditions play an important role. In the ride, the athlete receives a horse from the organizers. The reasons are both financial and organizational. It's kind of an invitation to moderation. It is somewhere and good, but it can also be a disadvantage. Things are evolving and the pentathlon passes into a difficult stage today. Sport performance in the era of speed is often viewed as a financial factor. Athletes and coaches are supported in their sponsorship efforts. Sponsors want to be seen by a large number of people. The modern pentathlon must be seen to exist. I tried, as a sports teacher, to do an analysis of the knowledge at the level of the students at the sports school in Deggendorf, Germany about this Olympic discipline. Over 90% of those questioned did not hear about the modern

pentathlon Olympic event, and more than half did not know the term pentathlon. Hope remains with the traditional countries in this Olympic discipline so that the pentathlon Olympic spirit will not disappear.

5. The military pentathlon and the future of military sports competitions

The military pentathlon is a variant of the modern pentathlon. It takes place within the military organization. It is considered the king of military sports. As a purely military test, the military pentathlon tests the military in the five disciplines: speed and precision shooting, obstacle track, obstacle swimming, grenade throwing in precision and distance and cross. The history of the military pentathlon begins in 1946 shortly after the end of the war. It was wanted from the beginning to be a way of preparing the soldiers from different countries. The military pentathlon is inspired by a Dutch competition of paratroopers. The Dutchmen's retreat consisted of a parachute followed by a difficult march with various obstacles. At the end of the march, the soldiers were forced to shoot and throw grenades. The first edition of 1947 held in Freiburg, then a German city under French occupation, was attended by only three countries: Belgium, France, and Germany. After a modest start, the military pentathlon was rapidly adopted by many CISM member countries [9]. This organization is one of the most appreciated sports organizations in the world. "Friendship through Sport" is the motto of the CISM, and the rivalry between the military of over one hundred countries is a fabulous event. That's what Captain Debrus wanted in 1948 through this sporting manifesto. Peace and friendship between the soldiers and the possibility of them fighting through sport. From 1950 until today, there have been three difficult moments, when the world military pentathlon championship did not take place. The aeronautical pentathlon is

an invention and pride of Sweden, being the country that won the most championships. It is intended for the military in the air forces and is part of the CISM[10]. The naval pentathlon was invented by the Italian officer Giuseppe Vocaturo in 1953. The samples are specific to the navy troops. And these two variants are purely military versions of the modern pentathlon. The evolution of the modern battlefield, strongly influenced by the modern combat technique, will surely change the pentathlon contest register. Even if respect for the Olympic spirit is desired, the pentathlon must take into account the evolution of society so as not to be forgotten. Russia's idea is interesting by organizing the War Olympics competitions under the tutelage of Army Games [14]. Countries in the former Soviet bloc have taken a bold step by upgrading athletic races between soldiers.

6. Conclusions

The pentathlon was an Olympic discipline appreciated in ancient Greece. Not every athlete could become a pentathlon athlete. If you were accepted by the organizers to participate in the pentathlon, it was an honor and a great responsibility. The respect of the Greeks for the pentathlon is appreciated in the way of training, selection, organization, and unfolding of the contest. This pentathlon spirit can make the pentathlon athlete exist. The way you manage to report yourself to such an event provides in fact a mirror image of the society and the organization you belong to. Countries that have understood this ancient Olympic spirit treat it as such and this is proven both in the results of the athletes and in their way of preparation. The military pentathlon is the supreme test for the military. Each army wishes to be able to participate in the pentathlon, but this requires respect for the ancient Greek spirit [3].

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