



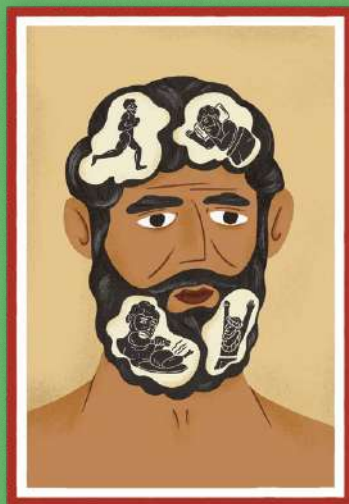
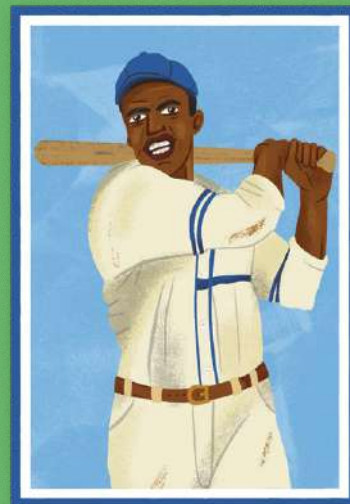
# THE ORIGINS OF SPORTS

**ŠTĚPÁNKA SEKANINOVÁ, TOM VELČOVSKÝ  
& MATEJ ILČÍK**



ALBATROS





# INTRODUCTION



But these cavemen and cavewomen also started making tools. And before long, they were good at other things too. Slowly, without even knowing it, they began to change the world around them, making it nicer to live in. Prehistoric folk would surely be surprised by how comfortable we modern folk are. It's funny how we have to go for a run just to stay healthy, because we sit in front of the TV for hours watching sports where people run for a living.

These days, we thankfully no longer have to fight nature or each other. So how do we test what we're good at? By racing to the finish line, scoring goals, and learning to work together as a team player.

That's why this book is not about the first to the finish line. It is about those who started things. It is about those who felt that playing was more important than winning.

If this book were only about the winners, it might be the biggest book about sports ever. It also might be the most boring one. We know now that being the biggest or the fastest is not the main thing. Having fun is way more important.

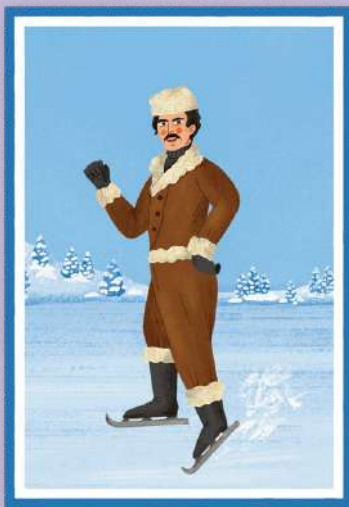
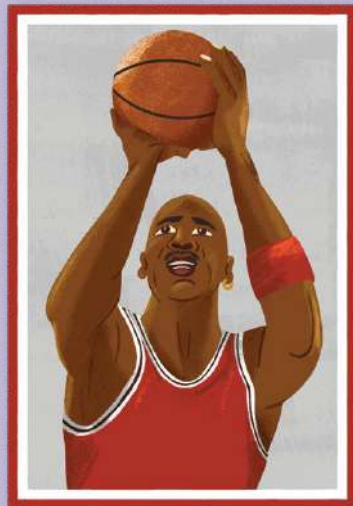
That's why this book is super fun. So read on to learn lots about the past and present of people and sports! As you'll see, *several* people came in first . . .

From the time we're young, we compete. First steps. First words. First to use the toilet. First to finish lunch . . . Wanting to be the first has been important since the caveman days. Why? Because it helped us survive. Doing things well was a matter of life and death. It's not all about speed, though. Being strong is a big deal too. Often, the strong are big but not as fast. So what's more important? Speed or strength?

Friends and family are always testing how strong, fast, and able they are. Whose hair is the longest? Whose hands are the biggest? Whose grades are the best? We can't help but do this. Even if our biggest rival is our own self.

The earliest people competed with nature too—even if they didn't know it. Again, being strong and fast helped us survive. When hunting or running away from animals, you had to be fast and able—especially when fighting with neighboring tribes who wanted your fire, food, or home.





## TABLE OF CONTENTS



1. PREHISTORY	6
2. ATHLETICS	8
3. SKATING	12
4. ICE HOCKEY	14
5. GOLF	18
6. FOOTBALL	20
7. TENNIS	24
8. BASKETBALL	28
9. SWIMMING	32
10. SKIING	34
11. BASEBALL	38



# PREHISTORY

## WINNING IS LESS IMPORTANT THAN EATING

The word “sports” has referred to having fun while exercising since the Middle Ages, seven hundred years ago. But of course, people have always played sports. In antiquity, people raced around on horses in chariot races to prepare for battle. And way back in the caveman days, people would play-fight to get strong enough to hunt massive animals like woolly mammoths. But years passed, times changed, and modern things like cars and TVs were invented. Soon, people no longer had to go on long journeys in search of

food, nor did they have to fight to survive. Being strong and fast became less important, and being clever became more important. More people started living in towns and cities, and everything was more comfortable. Fighting and struggling to survive were rechanneled into sports and games. Come and join us, then, as we explore the origins of the sports we know and love, and see how people learned that taking part is more important than winning!



## NO PAIN, NO GAIN

Cavemen and cavewomen were athletes, even though they didn't know it. Think of the miles they walked every day in search of food! Whether this food was from gathering plants or hunting animals, still they had to find it. Along the way, they were sometimes forced to run away from dangerous animals. Fear for their lives made them record-breaking sprinters . . .



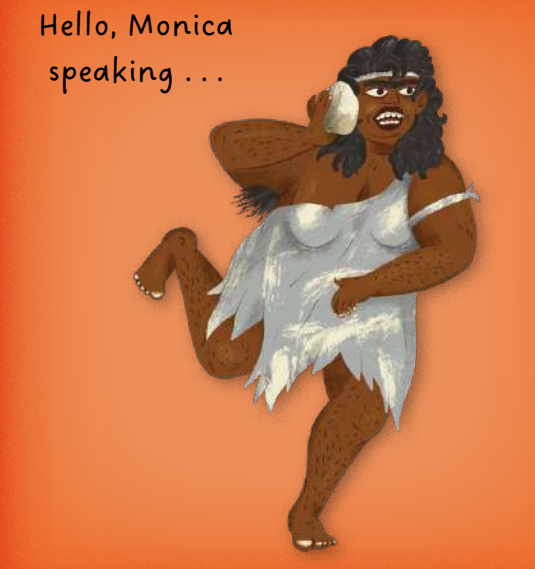
## HUNTING ↑

At other times, it was our hairy, prehistoric ancestors who did the chasing, as they went after their prey. And by throwing their weapons, they expanded prehistoric sports to include the javelin and stone-throwing, laying the foundations of the hard, long sporting event known as the decathlon. The main purpose of prehistoric sports was to train and prepare for a life of trials, not a life of entertainment.



## PREHISTORIC GEAR →

Strong legs, fast feet, a strip of leather hanging from the waist. Later, primitive shoes made from the skin of a powerful animal, such as a bear, so that the athlete could have their power.





# ATHLETICS



## HOORAY, A RACE AT LAST!

The Ancient Greeks were a tremendously competitive people. For them, winning a race meant becoming a hero—and how Ancient Greece loved her heroes! (There is not a single Greek myth without heroes in it.) As you can

imagine, the Greeks competed in anything and everything. This included non-sports, such as reciting texts loudly or blasting on a trumpet. All contests were referred to as *agon*.



## UP AND OVER . . .

Have you ever been on the vaulting horse, balance beam, or jump box in the school gym? Not easy, is it? But this gymnastic discipline is a piece of cake compared with what they did many years ago on the island of Crete. They vaulted over running bulls, and they had several ways of doing it.

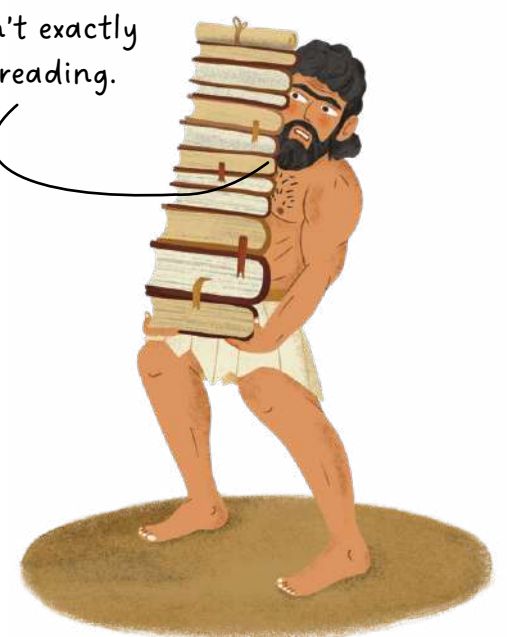
For one of the easier vaults, the gymnast approached the bull from the side, grabbed it by the horns, and hurled himself over the animal's body in one fell swoop. For one of the harder vaults, the gymnast stood face to face with the bull and grabbed it by the horns. The animal jerked its head, tossing the gymnast gracefully over its back. Sometimes

there was an intermediate phase: after being tossed, the gymnast would land on his hands or feet on the animal's back, before going into an impressive loop that all were waiting for. →

We file the bull's horns down to make them safer, kid.



This isn't exactly light reading.



## KALOKAGATHOS →

Crete is just a stone's throw away from mainland Greece. Although the Ancient Greeks left the bull-vaulting to the Cretans, they developed sports on a large scale. For the Greeks, sports meant cultivating a healthy body and healthy mind. So they insisted that the mind, as well as the body, should be trained and exercised. Not only did they work their muscles, but they also worked hard on their education. As practiced by the Ancient Greeks, this principle is known as *kalokagathos*.

That horn-playing is driving me mad!





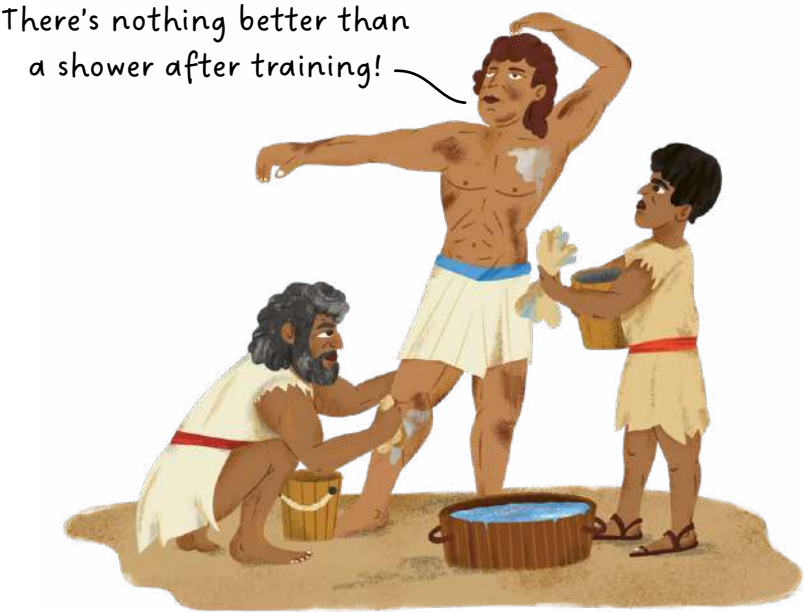
# RUNNING DISCIPLINES

Today's athletes could test their strength and abilities in a competition with the athletes of Ancient Greece. One course was one length of the racetrack within a stadium, about 650 feet. A second course was the length of two racetracks. There was even a discipline for endurance runners, nearly three miles—a piece of cake for today's distance runners. Today's athletes wouldn't like having to run naked, however. That's right: the Ancient Greeks competed in their birthday suits. This had one big advantage—their outfit cost them nothing!



# WHY WERE THE ATHLETES NAKED? ↑

Their beautiful, muscular, suntanned bodies gave the Greeks a sense of superiority over other peoples and their surroundings, so why not parade them for all to see at the Olympic Games? Long ago, competitors at one of the earliest Olympics wore a short loincloth around the waist. Then, in 720 BCE, at the 15th Olympic Games, the loincloth worn by one of the runners fell off. Not wishing to stop and tie it back on, he finished the race naked. Other competitors followed his example, with the result that from the 6th century BCE onward, running naked was the standard.



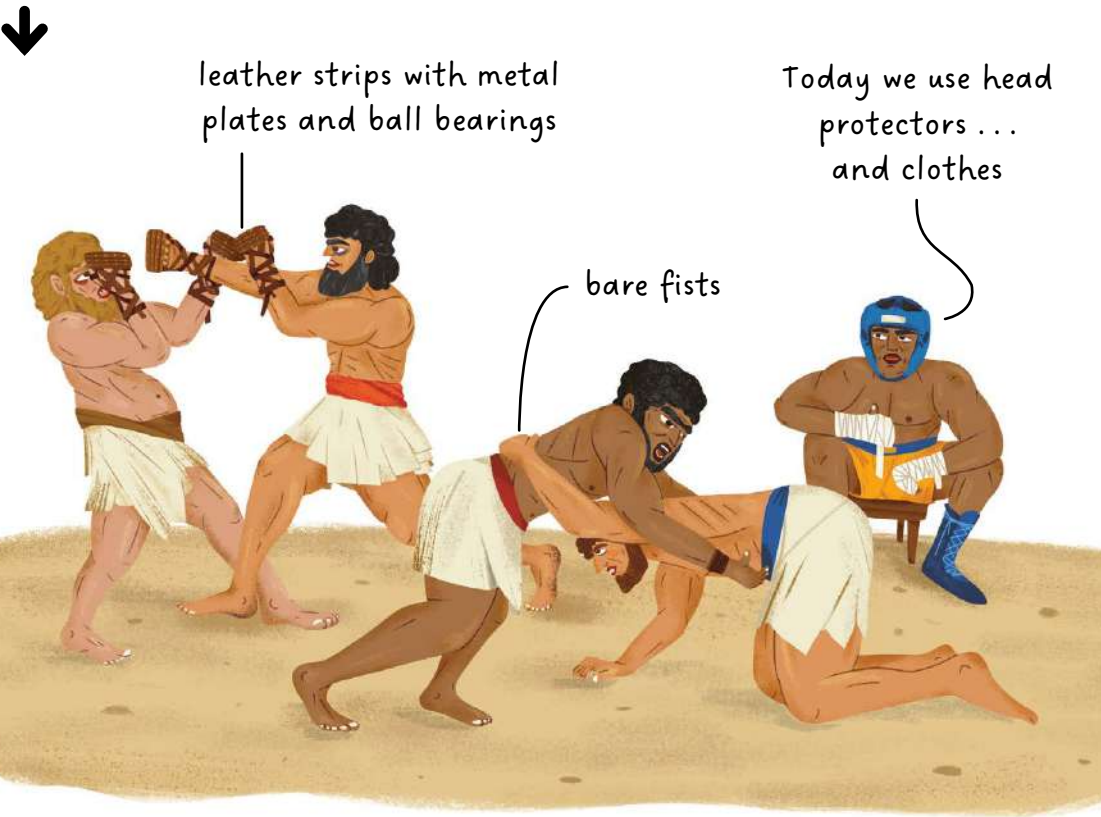
# SPORTS STARS ↑

As time passed, Greek athletes became true stars who practiced their sport professionally. Like their modern counterparts, athletes in Ancient Greece were surrounded by a team of doctors, with professional coaches to manage their training programs and tell them what to eat and when to sleep. Training in ancient times was more than tough; on rare occasions, athletes even died. On the other hand, winners of competitions became rich and were invited into high society. Sound familiar?



# SMACK, BANG, WALLOP

Boxing of some kind or other has been popular since prehistoric times. It helped young men stay in shape, preparing them to fight for real. So it should come as no surprise that the Ancient Greeks were keen on boxing. At first, they pounded away with bare fists; later, boxers began to bind their hands with leather straps fitted with metal plates and ball bearings. Blows were directed at the hands and face only. Although boxers wore a helmet to protect the head and ears, a landed fist was pretty painful. Ow! Fortunately, boxers, as well as being remarkably dexterous, knew how to perform many evasive and defensive maneuvers. There were no breaks during the match.



# PENTATHLON →

First included in the 18th Olympic Games in 708 BCE, the pentathlon soon became quite popular. The pentathlon consisted of the following: Running, of course, although there was no timekeeping—the aim was simply to finish first! The long jump, in which the long-jumper jumped with special weights in each hand called *halteres*, which he tossed behind him as he jumped. The discus throw—with a discus weighing between 3 and 13 pounds (experts disagree on which technique was used; some claim that it was like today's, others that the throwing was done from a standing start with a forward bend). The javelin throw—using an Ancient Greek spear between 4 and 5 feet long, with a looped strap in the middle in place of the grip to ensure accuracy of flight (in those days, javelin throwing was about accuracy, as well as distance). The last discipline of the pentathlon was wrestling, the aim of which was to throw the opponent to the ground three times.



# THE ORIGINS OF SPORTS



**ŠTĚPÁNKA SEKANINOVÁ,  
TOM VELČOVSKÝ & MATEJ ILČÍK**

© B4U Publishing for Albatros,  
an imprint of Albatros Media Group, 2023  
5. května 1746/22, Prague 4, Czech Republic  
Written by Štěpánka Sekaninová & Tom Velčovský  
Illustrations © Matěj Ilčík, 2023  
Translated by Andrew Oakland  
Edited by Scott Alexander Jones

Printed in China by Leo Paper Group

All rights reserved.  
Reproduction of any content is strictly prohibited without  
the written permission of the rights holders.

Logos used on page 17 are owned by  
Lightning Hockey LP™  
Boston Professional Hockey Association, Inc.™  
WINNIPEG JETS HOCKEY CLUB LIMITED PARTNERSHIP™  
Detroit Red Wings, Inc.™

The use of these logos is without the consent and authorization of the rights-holders of these logos.







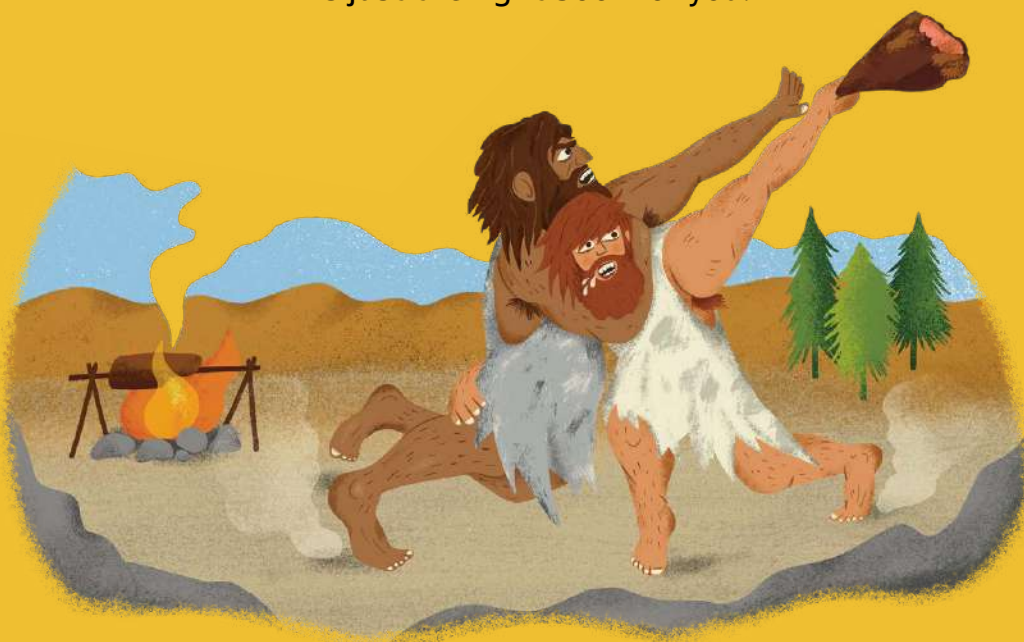
# THE ORIGINS OF SPORTS

Štěpánka Sekaninová, Tom Velčovský  
& Matej Ilčík

The player takes the ball, rounds the defender, and fires into the net. It's a goal! But where did the idea of a goal come from? And what is the origin of the ball? And why do we kick it rather than carry it?

Because if we did, it would no longer be soccer but rugby, or maybe even football . . .

If these questions have ever occurred to you, or if the fact that hockey was played in Ancient Egypt is news to you, then *The Origins of Sports* is just the right book for you.



ISBN 978-80-00-06796-4



9 788000 067964



\$ 17.95  
Printed in China  
by Leo Paper Group  
[www.albatrosbooks.com](http://www.albatrosbooks.com)

Albatros Media  
albatros\_books\_  
Albatros Books  
Albatros Media US  
BooksAlbatros