

A **gladiator** (Latin: *gladiator* 'swordsman', from Latin *gladius* 'sword') was an armed combatant who entertained audiences in the Roman Republic and Roman Empire in violent confrontations with other gladiators, wild animals, and condemned criminals. Some gladiators were volunteers who risked their lives and their legal and social standing by appearing in the arena. Most were despised as slaves, schooled under harsh conditions, socially marginalized, and segregated even in death.

Irrespective of their origin, gladiators offered spectators an example of Rome's martial ethics and, in fighting or dying well, they could inspire admiration and popular acclaim. They were celebrated in high and low art, and their value as entertainers was commemorated in precious and commonplace objects throughout the Roman world.

The origin of gladiatorial combat is open to debate. There is evidence of it in funeral rites during the Punic Wars of the 3rd century BC, and thereafter it rapidly became an essential feature of politics and social life in the Roman world. Its popularity led to its use in ever more lavish and costly games.

The gladiator games lasted for nearly a thousand years, reaching their peak between the 1st century BC and the 2nd century AD.

The documented history of sports goes back at least 3,000 years. Sports originated in ancient Greece. The world's first sports often involved the preparation for war or training as a hunter, which explains why so many early games involved the throwing of spears, stakes, and rocks, and sparring one-on-one with opponents.

It was at the first Olympic Games in 776 BCE—with events such as foot and chariot races, wrestling, jumping, and discus and javelin throwing—that the Greeks introduced formal sports to the world. The following list, by no means exhaustive, takes a look at the beginnings and evolution of some of today's most popular sporting pastimes.

**Cricket:** The game of cricket originated in south-east England sometime in the late 16th century. By the 18th century, it had become the national sport, making inroads globally in the 19th and 20th centuries. The prototype for the modern cricket bat—with a willow blade and a cane handle layered with strips of rubber, then tied with twine and covered with another layer of rubber to form a grip—was invented around 1853. (The longest recorded game of cricket took place in 1939 and spanned a period of nine days.)

**Baseball:** Alexander Cartwright (1820-1892) of New York invented the baseball field as we know it in 1845. Cartwright and the members of his Knickerbocker Base Ball Club of New York devised the first rules and regulations that became the accepted standard for the modern game of baseball.

**Softball:** In 1887, George Hancock, a reporter for the Chicago Board of Trade, invented softball as a form of indoor baseball that was first played on a cold winter day inside the warm Farragut Boat Club.