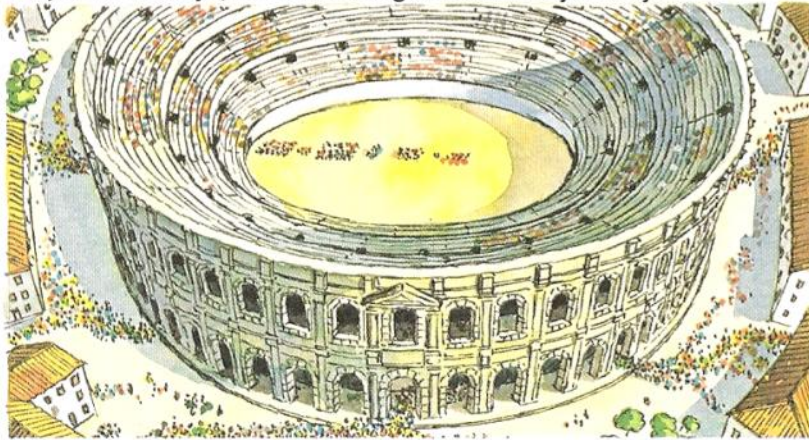


The Games

The Games was the name given to the fights and massacres that were held to entertain the Roman citizens. The idea began in 264BC, when two men staged a fight to the death between six slaves, as an offering to their dead father. Fights like this became very popular. They took place on public holidays, in honour of a god or a military victory.



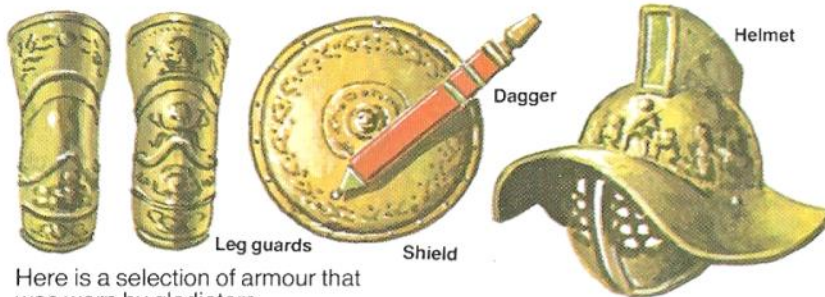
At first the audience watched from wooden stands, but later stone amphitheatres, like the Colosseum in Rome, were built. They were equipped with lavatories and eating

houses. The Games always began with a procession. The gladiators (the men who fought) were accompanied by dancers, musicians, jugglers, and priests.

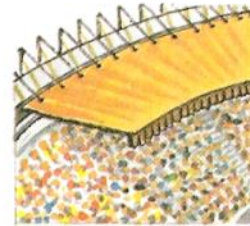


Gladiators were slaves, criminals or men who were in debt. They were trained in special schools, often by former gladiators.

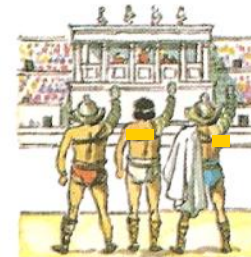
To make the fights more interesting, there were different styles of fighting with different weapons and armour. The two gladiators on the right are dressed as a Samnite and a Thracian, enemies of the Romans. The man with a net and trident was called a *retiarius*.



Here is a selection of armour that was worn by gladiators.



An awning, called a *velarium*, could be spread over the seating area, to protect the spectators from sun and rain.



Before the start of a fight, the gladiators greeted the emperor with the words, 'Hail Caesar', those about to die salute you'.



The crowd decided the fate of a defeated man by praising or booing him. The emperor then signalled thumb up 'let him live' or thumb down 'kill him'.



Successful gladiators became heroes and were rewarded with gold. If a gladiator won many fights, he might be able to buy his freedom.



Some gladiators were made to fight blindfolded on horseback.



Others were matched against wild animals, such as lions or tigers.



One of the most spectacular fights involved flooding the arena in order to reconstruct a naval battle, such as the one between the Athenians and the Persians.



Animals were imported from abroad and displayed in the arena. On one occasion herds of giraffe and ostriches were let loose, only to be hunted down by teams of archers.



Sometimes wild animals were set to fight each other to death.



On occasions, massacres were held in which Jews, Christians and criminals were killed by wild animals in the arena.



At the end of the fights the dead bodies were removed and sand spread everywhere, to cover the blood.

*Caesar was one of the emperor's titles.

Races and games

Public entertainments in Rome were called *ludi* (games). Many were paid for by the government as they were part of the religious calendar (see pages 66-67). There were three kinds of entertainment: theatrical performances (*ludi scaenici*, see page 56), chariot races (*ludi*

circenses), and gladiator fights and beast hunts (*munera*). At first these events were staged together to form a whole day's entertainment. By imperial times, however, each event could be seen separately, often in its own specially designed building.

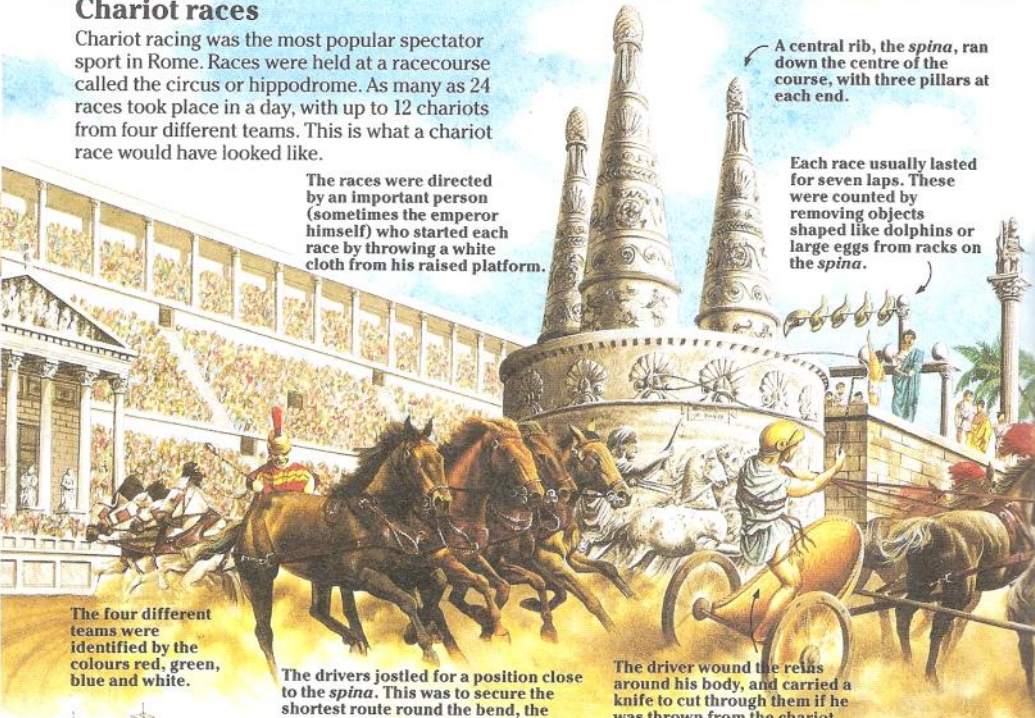
Chariot races

Chariot racing was the most popular spectator sport in Rome. Races were held at a racecourse called the circus or hippodrome. As many as 24 races took place in a day, with up to 12 chariots from four different teams. This is what a chariot race would have looked like.

The races were directed by an important person (sometimes the emperor himself) who started each race by throwing a white cloth from his raised platform.

A central rib, the *spina*, ran down the centre of the course, with three pillars at each end.

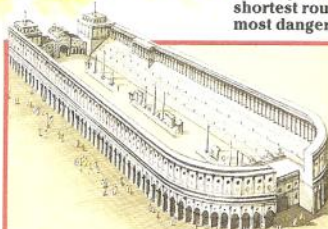
Each race usually lasted for seven laps. These were counted by removing objects shaped like dolphins or large eggs from racks on the *spina*.



The four different teams were identified by the colours red, green, blue and white.

The drivers jostled for a position close to the *spina*. This was to secure the shortest route round the bend, the most dangerous part of the race.

The driver wound the reins around his body, and carried a knife to cut through them if he was thrown from the chariot.



The *Circus Maximus* in Rome, shown here, was the largest and oldest racetrack in the empire. It was 550m (over 1800ft) long and 180m (almost 600ft) wide, and held up to 250,000 spectators.

Usually either two or four horses pulled each chariot, but sometimes special races were held with six or even eight horses to a team. The more horses, the harder it was to control the chariot.



Each team had its own stables and trainers. Supporters of the teams were fanatical, and unpopular results could lead to riots. Champion drivers, like the one in this mosaic†, became very rich and famous.

Gladiator fights

Gladiators were prisoners, criminals, slaves, or paid volunteers, who fought for the public's entertainment. Gladiator fights and shows involving wild animals were very popular in Rome. At first, like chariot races, they were held in the circus, but later they were staged in stone buildings called amphitheatres†. Games were often put on by individuals to mark an important event like a battle victory. The earliest games were small, but they gradually became more extravagant. Trajan† presided over a show that lasted 117 days in which 10,000 gladiators took part.



There were amphitheatres all over the empire. The largest held up to 50,000 spectators. Rich citizens sat in the best seats, near ground level. Poorer people sat higher up.

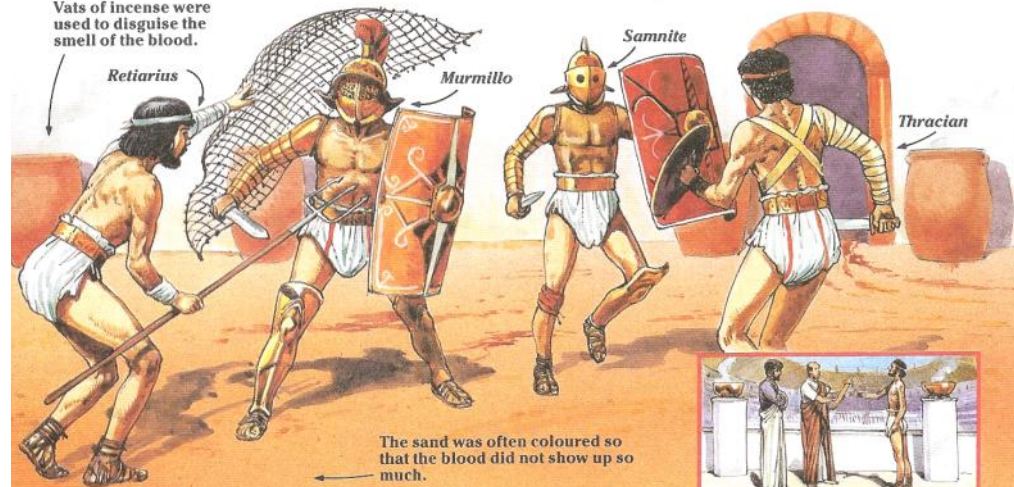


Games began in the morning with a procession past the seat of the emperor or presiding official. The gladiators were accompanied by dancers, jugglers, priests and musicians.



Next came the beast shows. Some rare animals were simply displayed. More common animals, like bears, panthers and bulls were forced to fight each other, hunted in the arena by archers, or let loose on defenceless prisoners. Many fights involved the bloody and violent killing of thousands of animals and humans. After the beasts came comic acts, mimes and mock fights.

Vats of incense were used to disguise the smell of the blood.



The sand was often coloured so that the blood did not show up so much.

The gladiators fought in the afternoon. There were four types, distinguished by their weapons and costumes. To make the show more interesting, gladiators in different categories fought each other; for example a *retiarius* might fight a *murmillo*. They normally continued

to the death, but defeated or wounded fighters could appeal for mercy. After listening to the crowd, the official in charge signalled with his thumb whether the man should live or die. We think that the 'thumbs up' signal meant that the gladiator should live, but we have nothing to prove this.



A successful gladiator received money, a crown, and great adulation. After many victories he might be awarded a wooden sword, which signified his freedom. Many freed fighters became trainers at special schools for gladiators.