

KFKU Sportscast
April 13, 1944

WAR AND ATHLETICS, THEIR PARADOXES

Fred Eugene Leonard says: Quote. Man's earliest endeavor to perfect the body, discipline the mind and mold the character of the young by means of selected forms of physical activity and special regimen could doubtless be traced back to a prehistoric age. The study of ancient customs of China and India, Egypt, Babylonia and Assyria, the Phoenicians and Carthaginians, the Persians and the Hebrews might also yield some curious facts. But if one's purpose is to follow the evolution of modern forms of physical education in Europe and America and to note the significant contributions and modifications introduced at various stages, it is sufficient to begin with Greece as it was in the century and a half whose middle point is the year of Salamis and Thermopylae (480 B.C.). There we find 'gymnastics' generally adopted as a necessary part of education, provision everywhere made for the exercise of youths and grown men in establishments supported and administered by the state, great national festivals at which the chief attractions were contests in physical prowess, and at a later day sculptors able to reproduce from the type presented to them in the gymnasia ideal human figures which have never been excelled in beauty.

"Several things must be borne in mind when one thinks of Greece in the period of the Persian Wars. It was not a nation in the modern sense of a political unit with a central government and circumscribed territory, but a group of independent states and cities in European Greece, on the islands of the Aegean Sea, along the west coast of Asia Minor, and wherever else the Greek language was spoken by persons who felt the tie of a common descent, common religious beliefs and common customs.