

## GYMNASTICS -- AN ANCIENT RECREATION

Apart from the dyed-in-the-wool enthusiasts engaged in its activities, gymnastics remained a closed book to most Australians until the advent of the Melbourne Olympic Games when, with the world's greatest exponents of an ancient recreation shown in action, gymnastics as a spectacle created great enthusiasm.

Gymnastics, from the ancient Greek, means athletic, disciplinary exercise, and gymnasium the ground or place for such exercises. Greek rulers of bygone times decreed that the youth of Greece must strive for physical perfection and this led to the building of huge roofless <sup>a</sup>gymnasiums large enough to encompass a running track, a field for weight, discus and javelin throwers, dressing rooms, bathrooms and rubbing rooms.

Although only the males competed at these places, the gardens surrounding them became popular meeting places for social occasions and rivalled the market place. However, after the Romans had conquered Greece and, in 392 A.D., the Roman Emperor Theodosius decreed that physical training was no longer compulsory, the <sup>a</sup>gymnasiums were closed as training places and the youth lost interest in gymnastics.

Since the founding of the modern Olympics eighty years ago, however, fresh impetus has been given to gymnastics, and they now form, perhaps, the most interesting and instructive series of events in the Games programme.

One of the most difficult and artistic of all Olympic events, gymnastics calls for perfect physical fitness, judgement and incredible skill of both men and women, which astonished ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ Australians who saw the remarkable exhibitions for the first time at the Melbourne Games <sup>25</sup>nineteen years ago.