**Olympians and Gladiators:**

**Single Combat Giants of the Arena**

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Combat is a word that is often times thrown around to describe a variety of situations. In the eyes of ancient Greeks and Romans though, “combat” was a word full of intensity and majesty, and whose purpose was well understood. Combat meant that a ferocious struggle was occurring and it was this struggle that dominated many Greek and Roman lives. Single combat was especially idolized as it pitched man against man in a personal and brutish struggle for their lives. Examples of these lives, constantly afflicted by violence, are those of the proud Greek Olympians involved in combat sports and the gritty Roman gladiators. The lives of these men (and sometimes women), often locked in single combat, captured the imaginations of their people and eventually dominated significant parts of their culture. The Hellenic Games were national events that united separate city-states and even forced fighting to cease. The main combat sports of the Greeks were boxing, wrestling, and pankration. These sports developed well up to the level that we see in this day and age and became spectacles of grandeur. Over several centuries later and in a slightly different part of the world, the Romans, inspired by their Greek neighbors and Etruscan ancestors began gladiatorial battles. Although the exact origin of the spread of gladiatorial combat is debated some believe that “the first gladiators were slaves who were made to fight to the death at the funeral of a distinguished aristocrat, Junius Brutus Pera, in 264 BC”. This is in line with the knowledge of the establishments of *munera,* ludi, and grand events at the Coliseum really help shed light on the scope and importance of gladiatorial combat in the daily lives of the Romans. With knowledge of the magnitude of the importance of the Olympics and gladiators in mind, one has to consider how the virtues and motives behind staged single combat led to the extreme popularity and widespread integration of Olympic events and gladiatorial combat in the daily lives of Greek and Roman citizens.