

What is Heavy Athletics at the Celtic Highland Games of the Quad Cities

Heavy Athletics is the original Strongman sport. The origins of the Scottish athletic games are lost in the mists of time but they still reflect the rugged strength of the Highland dwellers that invented them. Today, many of these games are recognized Olympic events. Heavy Athletics is made up of six athletic endeavors, which grew out of the Celtic warrior traditions of testing fellow Clansmen for strength and agility needed in the hand-to-hand fighting of early wars.

The equipment currently used for the Highland Games has evolved from the practical, everyday items that were available to the early Scotsmen and have fortunately taken on less of a live and death meaning. The character of the athletes has not changed in that honor and sportsmanship is valued as much if not more than winning. This can often be seen in competitors helping their nearest rivals to improve. However, the demographics of the athletes have changed reflecting the multi-cultural nature of our great nation.

The endeavors that make up the Heavy Athletics comprised of:



World Champion
Kevin Rogers

Clachneart (Stone of strength) & Braemar Stone

These ancient events are similar to the modern day shot-put, using a stone instead of a steel ball. The stone must be 'put' from the front of the shoulder using only one hand.

A 16 to 22 pound stone is used for the **Clachneart**, which allows a seven-and-a-half foot run-up to a toe-board. The **Braemar** is a standing throw using a 22 to 30 pound stone.

The contestants are judged on the longest of the three tosses.



World Champion
Bill Leffler

Weight Throws

Scottish Weight throws are the origin of the NCAA track weight throw. The weight throw was also contested in the Olympics until 1920 Games. A heavy (56 lbs) and light (28 lbs) metal implement is thrown for distance. The weight is thrown one-handed from behind the toe board with a nine-foot run up allowed. Any style may be used, but the most popular and efficient is to spin like a discus thrower.

The weights are based on "stone" weights of the old imperial measuring system, often used in agriculture. The implements thrown developed from yard weights used to balance scales. A "stone" weighs 14-pounds, which means the athlete is throwing 2 and 4 stone weights.

The contestants are judged on the longest of the three throws.

Scottish Hammer



The Scottish hammer is the precursor to the Olympic wire hammer throw and most likely comes from throwing black smith hammers or “mells”, which were used to drive in fence posts.

Today, the Scottish hammer is metal ball weighing 16 or 22 pounds (12 and 16 pounds for women) on a 50 inch long cane or PVC shaft and is thrown for distance.

The hammer is thrown over the shoulder with the competitors back facing the field. The hammer is whirled in circles about the competitor’s body from over his head to down in front of his feet, each time picking up speed until the release. The competitor's feet may not move until after he releases the hammer over his shoulder.

The contestants are judged on the longest of the three throws.

Sheaf Toss



The Sheaf Toss uses a hay fork to toss a 16 to 20 pound sheaf (burlap bag full of twine) for height. This event has its roots in agricultural where farmers would throw wheat sheafs into the loft.

Top competitors can launch the sheaf over 30 feet in the air.

An unusual aspect of this event is that any competitor may use any other competitor’s fork.

The highest toss wins.

Weight Toss



The 4 stone or 56 pound weight used for distance event is also tossed for height. Since this event is traditionally the last events of the day, it is a gut check for the competitor. This event is periodically used in the World Strongest Man Competition.

With heights thrown over 15 feet, this event is akin to throwing a car battery onto a highway overpass.

The highest toss wins.

Caber Toss

The day culminating with the signature event, the **Caber Toss**. This event requires raw strength, balance, and coordination to pick up a 16-20 foot tall tapered pole weighing 90 to 140 pounds and flipping it end over end.

This event is done for accuracy not distance or height.



The Celtic Highland Games of the Quad Cities draws top amateur athletes and has seen **FIVE** different world records broken over its history. Athletes compete in divisions from the top amateur down to novice as well as lightweight (under 190 pounds), women’s and masters (over 40) divisions.