



Why was the Roman army like a top football team?

How could one city, Rome, control an empire that stretched over thousands of miles? The most important reason was the Roman army. Find out what made it so successful as you compare the Roman army to a top football team!

The best equipment

There were two types of soldier: legionaries and auxiliaries. The legionaries were armed with a javelin, sword, dagger and shield and protected by body armour. Weapons and armour were constantly improved as new ideas were tested. Some legions had larger weapons, such as the ballista (see page 5).

Total commitment

All soldiers were volunteers. They stayed in the army for 25 years and they were not allowed to marry. They were sent anywhere in the Empire, usually far away from their homeland. The army became their family. The best soldiers became centurions, in charge of 80 other men.

Good rewards

Roman soldiers were paid well. They got good food and every fort had a hospital and baths. They lived better than most civilians. After 25 years the legionaries retired and were given a pension of about ten years' pay or a small farm.

Mobility

The Romans built straight roads so their soldiers and cavalry could get from fort to fort very quickly.



Legionary: heavily armed footsoldiers

Auxiliary: lightly armed, faster-moving troops, including some cavalry (horsemen)

Excellent training and fitness

Roman soldiers trained hard. They learned to use their weapons, fight together and follow orders precisely. They had to be able to march 32 km in five hours carrying their full kit which included: two swords; a spear and shield; a thick cloak for warmth and to sleep in; two posts for making a defensive camp at night; a cooking pot, bowl and spoon; a spade, pick or axe; food for three to four days; and a bag with spare boots, money, dice, etc.

International squad

To start with, most soldiers in the Roman army came from Italy. That soon changed. As the Romans conquered new territory they got the best local fighters to join the army. In the first 60 years after the Romans conquered Britain, at least 9000 British men joined the army and were sent abroad to fight for Rome. In AD120, when Hadrian's Wall was built, hardly any of the soldiers were from Italy. They came from all over the Empire: France, Spain, Hungary, Syria, Algeria and Iraq.

Discipline and tactics

The Romans used ruthless tactics to keep soldiers loyal. If there was a mutiny, they would 'decimate' the unit – killing every tenth soldier. They were equally ruthless in punishing rebellious people. They scared people into submission. Latest estimates suggest that out of a population of 2 million Britons about 100,000 were killed by Roman soldiers. They also used clever battle tactics, for example, the testudo (which means tortoise). (See the photo.)

- 1 Why was this formation called a testudo?
- 2 Why would it have been effective in battle?
- 3 What does it tell you about the skills and training of a Roman soldier?



Year 7 – Task

Design a recruitment poster for the Roman army using the information on this page. Your word limit is **twenty** words! Be clear to people about the advantages of joining and make it colourful!