

SHADED GOLD MEDALS OF THE PARIS TRUNCATED OLYMPICS (THE WAR AND OLYMPIC PARTICIPATION)

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Abstract: *The Russian-Ukrainian war opened a new chapter in the history of the Olympics. The exclusion of Russia and Belarus had a major impact on the medal table and raised the question of the relationship between sport and politics. In the future, the IOC will have to make difficult choices to ensure that the Olympics remain a celebration of peace and unity.*

Keywords : *Olympic Charter, paradigm shift on Olympism, equal treatment, discrimination equality of opportunity, war and peace, Pierre de Coubertin, olympics medal table 2024*

1. Introduction

Over the past decades, the Olympics have been at the centre of tensions on several occasions as a peaceful arena for competition between nations. The outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war has brought a new twist in this respect and raises serious questions about the intertwining of sport and politics.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has decided to exclude Russia and Belarus from the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, in an emergency situation due to the war. The reasons given are that the aggression is an affront to the Olympic ideals and that athletes from these countries should not be allowed to participate in international sport. The decision has sparked a lot of controversy, as many believe that athletes should not be collectively punished because of a country's political decisions. As Russia and Belarus are traditionally nations at the top of the medal table, their exclusion had a significant impact on the way the competition developed. The absence of these two countries gave other nations the opportunity to win more medals and improve their ranking in the medal table.

The shadow of war cast a shadow over the medals won at the Olympics, as many athletes of very high quality were absent from the competition.

Of course, the price of an Olympic gold medal is a huge struggle. It takes a lot of work and sacrifice. But the knowledge that the political situation has prevented some top athletes from taking part in probably leave the Olympic feeling a little short.

I am convinced that the majority of athletes feel the same way. They want to prove themselves on the track, they want to compete with the best, and the most valuable victory is the one you get in the hardest fight.

I sincerely hope that in the future the political situation will allow all talented athletes to compete at the Olympics to the best of their ability, regardless of their country of origin.

Methods

In my study, I compared the universal values of topsport with the current reality of sport by drawing parallels with the reality of sporting events, key words of the Olympic Charter. I have also used observation and case study analysis methods.

II. Main Part

1. The paper contrasts the geopolitical realities of our time with the principles of Olympism. It examines the devaluation of sporting values and touches on the international legal context, too. Today, unfortunately, it seems naïve to demand that people live in peace and make peace at least for the duration of the Olympic Games. In this way, sport would be the beautiful ribbon that binds people together, as Baron Coubertin wrote in his poem *Ode to Sport*.

The 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris will be hosted without one of the world's biggest sporting nations. The official stereotype is that Russian and Belorussian athletes were not allowed to compete under their own flags because they are aggressors. If this sanction were true, then a blanket ban would apply wherever guns thundered. In fact, there is a double standard in the Olympic movement.

The Olympic Games have always been more than just a sporting event. It has been used as a political tool on many occasions throughout history, and this case shows that sport and politics are closely intertwined.

By excluding Russia and Belorussia, the IOC puts their citizens in a difficult position. Athletes cannot bear any responsibility for the actions of their country.

It is not too difficult to predict how many Russian gold medals would have been won if Russians and Belorussians had not been the victims of discrimination. Because of this, the shine on the Paris Olympic gold medals has worn off a little.

The certain beautiful ribbon that Coubertin identified with peace was in fact only binding together people outside Russia and Belarus at the Olympic Games.

2. There are many opinions that the IOC's criteria were racist, and there were also opinions that Russia's strongest competitors were excluded. However we gloss over, there is no denying that in making this decision the IOC violated one of the most important principles of the Olympic movement (If you can muster some empathy on this point, just think of the individual competitors who did venture out to the Olympics and had to face being called foreign agents in the

tabloid press. This is dissonant, if only because the Olympic Charter states that the Olympic Games are not contested by countries (small and big powers) but by athletes.

If we look back at the skirmishes between the international sports federations and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), we can see that the IOC made recommendations on Russian and Belorussian athletes at the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. It recommended to the international federations and major international sports federations that athletes with Russian and Belorussian passports should only be allowed to compete in the Olympic Games and other international sporting events as individual athletes with neutral status. The recommendation also states that Russian and Belorussian team members who actively support the military and national security agencies are not eligible to participate.

Already in February 2022, the IOC took strong action against the Russian and Belorussian governments, resulting in Russian and Belorussian athletes being banned from international sporting competitions. Russian and Belorussian athletes were also banned from the Beijing Paralympics. The 2023 declaration issued at the eleventh summit of the Olympic Movement also proposed only a return to the neutral arena for individual athletes, saying that previous sanctions would remain in place and that it was at the discretion of the world's sporting federations to accept or reject the IOC's proposal. Sensing a political game, the Ukrainian Olympic Committee immediately announced that it would boycott the Paris Summer Olympics if the IOC allowed the return of Russian and Belorussian athletes.

3. Nearly thirty governments have agreed to this strange condition. The sports ministers were presumably under heavy political pressure. But this is against the rules of the Olympic Charter. The Olympic Charter requires political neutrality. So how can it be that political pressure is being put on the national Olympic committees?

Thomas Bach stressed that it is regrettable that some governments are criticised and that governments do not want to respect the will of the majority of the Olympic movement, the autonomy of all stakeholders of the sport.

At the same time, however, we need to be clear that it is not at all up to governments to decide which athletes should take part in which competitions.

If that is the case, then in my view such an intervention would mean the end of world sporting events. However, neither the IOC nor the international sports federations can play the role of the United Nations. Yet we can see that the international federations have taken their decisions on the participation of Russian and Belorussian athletes. The International Fencing Federation, for example, has approved the return of Russian and Belorussian fencers until the start of the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris.

4. It is very interesting to look at judo, which is Mr. Vladimir Putin's favorite sports branch. The International Judo Federation has allowed Russian and Be-

lorussian athletes to compete as individual neutral athletes, but the International Canoe Federation (ICF) decided to make this gesture only if the athletes' countries do not support the war against Ukraine, and here again the line is out because a sporting federation cannot play politics. These restrictions go against the good idea of the Olympic movement.

At the Triathlon World Championships – that was organized by the International Triathlon Federation - the recommendation of the IOC was approved that international Russian and Belorussian athletes should only be allowed to return to water competitions as individual athletes. Without going into all the Olympic sports, it should be pointed out that in tennis, for example, Russian and Belorussian tennis players were also allowed to compete in the Olympics only as individuals. All athletes who supported military events were not allowed to participate in the Olympics. Sanctions against those responsible for the war remain in place. The organisers were advised by the IOC to express their solidarity with Ukrainian athletes. At first glance, the recommendation seems reasonable, but we have to see that there are, unfortunately, many, many armed conflicts in the world today. It is also well known that the United States has fought nearly thirty wars in recent decades, none of which ended in victory, and interestingly enough, there is no excuse for their involvement, no one there has any idea of solidarity, American athletes are not being denied their national identity and neither are the nations that support Ukraine. What is this if not a double standard?

It sends out a very bad message that ideas of peaceful comparisons of athletic qualities are being undermined by fundamental political goals. As far as the Coubertin idea of peace is concerned, we can say that the peace of Jesus Christ is not present in our world.

5. It is bad enough for us that modern man is incapable of making a truce at least for the Olympics, as was required at the ancient Olympics in the 8th century b.C. The Olympic truce was born before the turn of the millennium to renew this idea. If the educated world could really implement and enforce this, then we would only have to strive for the Olympics every day, so that we live in peace and people do not kill each other.

It is not difficult to predict where it would lead if the International Olympic Committee were to decide that citizens of the states involved in war zones should not be allowed to compete in the Olympics. If that were consistently the case, there would have been far fewer flags for athletes to parade under at the opening ceremony of this year's Olympics.

6. It's absolutely impossible to provide a precise estimate of how many gold medals Russian athletes would have won at the Paris Olympics if they hadn't been excluded. This is due to several factors:

- a) The unpredictability of athletic performance: Olympic results are heavily influenced by athletes' form and their performance on the day of the competition. Predicting winners beforehand is extremely difficult.

- b) The impact of the ban: The exclusion itself could affect the preparation and motivation of Russian athletes. Some might not be able to perform at their best even if competing under neutral colors.
- c) Lack of official predictions: Currently, there are no reliable, official forecasts regarding the number of gold medals a full Russian team would have potentially won. While past Olympic results can offer some context, the circumstances of each Olympics are unique.

However, looking at previous Olympic Games, the Russian team has historically been strong in numerous sports and consistently ranked among the top nations in the medal table. For example, at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) team secured 20 gold medals.

Therefore, if Russia had been able to participate in the Paris Olympics with a full team, it's plausible they would have once again been among the most successful nations and would have won several gold medals. Predicting an exact number remains impossible of course at this time.

As for the Belarusian athletes, they were in a similar situation to the Russians. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) also disqualified Belarusian athletes from competing as a national team at the Paris Olympics because of their role in the war in Russia.

7. Because of *Modus vivendi*, like the Russian athletes, some Belarusian athletes were allowed to compete in individual neutral colours. They were allowed to compete in the category "Individual Neutral Athletes" (AIN), without flag, anthem or other national symbols. So, Belarusian athletes were not allowed to participate in the Paris Olympics as a national team, but some of those who took part in the tabloid propaganda campaign were allowed to compete as individuals in the 2024 Paris Olympics in individual neutral colours.

The IOC imposed strict conditions on their participation, such that athletes could not openly support the war in Ukraine and had no links with military or security organisations. In addition, they could not play their country's national anthem or raise their national flag in case of victory. In addition, medals in the AIN category were not counted in the countries' medal table.

8. The IOC imposed strict conditions on their participation, so that athletes could not openly support the war in Ukraine and had no links with military or security organisations. In addition, they could not play their country's anthem or raise their national flag in case of victory. In addition, medals in the AIN category were not counted in the countries' medal table. This is not a negligible circumstance. Of course, there were Russian and Belarusian athletes who won medals in the AIN category at the 2024 Olympics.

Ivan Litvinovich (Gymnastics, Men's Trampoline) won the gold medal, Vi-aleta Bardzilovskaya (Gymnastics, Women's Trampoline) and Yavhenii Zalati (Men's Single Pole Vault) won the silver medal, and Yavhenii Cihancov (102 kg) (Weightlifting) won the bronze medal.

According to my research among Russian athletes, there were no gold medals in the AIN category, but two silver medals were won in tennis by Mirra Andreyeva and Gyiana Snajgyer (Women's Doubles)

9. I understand from my correspondence with my friend Prof. Dr. Anatoly Peskov that the Russian sporting community was outraged and considered it extremely unfair that they had to compete in the AIN category for excellence who deserved to be in the national colours. In my view, the decision of the IOC is politically charged and it is easy to feel the frustration of Russian and Belarusian athletes, who have worked hard for years, for decades, for one goal: to be in the Olympics and to achieve the best results. It is perfectly understandable that they feel helpless in a situation over which they have no control.

As I see it, the individual performance of an athlete and the political decisions of his or her country should be two separate things. Many athletes condemn war and want peace, yet they bear the consequences of international sanctions.

Taking the Roman legal principle of *'audiator et altera pars'* as a starting point, it must be acknowledged that the IOC also had to make a difficult decision because war is an extremely serious situation and the international community wanted to respond in some way. The official position was that the sporting world could not remain indifferent, even though the IOC Charter requires neutrality.

10. The IOC argued that allowing national teams to compete would give legitimacy to the aggressor states. But who decides which countries are aggressors? Let us not forget that the IOC is not the Organisation of United Nations (UNO)

In addition, the views of Ukrainian athletes and some of the international sporting community had to be taken into account.

If we analyse this according to the SWOT analysis, we are faced with a dilemma for which there are no simple and fair answers. From the athletes' point of view it is extremely painful and unfair, and from the point of view of international politics the IOC was probably trying to make a point with the means at its disposal (in my opinion this was an act of power that went beyond sporting realities), because in my opinion the best thing would be if sport could truly remain outside politics and athletes could compete on the basis of their abilities, regardless of the political situation in their country of origin.

The answer to this question is usually that reality is more complicated than that.

11. It is clear that the medal table would indeed have been significantly affected by the fair participation of the entire Russian and Belarusian teams under normal conditions, since, if you look at the results of previous Olympics, both Russia and Belarus have regularly been among the most successful nations in a number of sports. For example, at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) team finished fifth in the medal table with 20 gold, 28

silver and 23 bronze medals. And Belarus came 45th with one gold, three silver and three bronze medals.

If we take this potential as a basis and assume that they would have put in a similarly strong performance in Paris, the following effects could have been expected:

- Russia would have moved up the medal table: they would probably have finished among the top 5 nations, possibly even on the international podium, significantly influencing the ranking behind the United States, China and other top sporting nations. The 20 gold medals alone would have made a noticeable difference in the standings.

- As to what we can expect in the future, depending on whether the conflict between the two sister nations finally ends in peace, I have a feeling that, although Belarus is not one of the biggest medal collectors, the 7 medals they won (including 1 gold) would have affected the mid-table order. If they had won more gold medals, they would obviously have finished higher. The participation of the Russian athletes would have had a much stronger impact on the standings without discrimination

- The results in some sports could have changed significantly: Both nations are strong in certain sports (e.g. gymnastics, wrestling, kayak-kenu, athletics, weightlifting). The absence of their athletes could have opened up the possibility of gold and other medals for other nations. This meant that the final results in some events could be very different from what we saw.

- The medals won by 'neutral' athletes do not reflect their full potential: it is important to note that the number of athletes competing as individual neutrals was limited and conditions were not ideal for them. A full, motivated team would probably have won more medals.

Conclusion

The relationship between war and the Olympics remains one of the greatest challenges for the future. The IOC faces a difficult task: on the one hand, it must preserve the ideal of the Olympics, and on the other, it must respond to the political situation in the world. The question is how to find a balance between sport and politics in the future and how to ensure that the Olympics are truly a celebration of peace and unity.

It is also not good for the Olympians that one of the world's greatest sporting nations could not participate in the Olympics because they cannot be sure if their performance was truly gold medal-winning or if they just won in a population of athletes without Russians, so the victory of the current Olympic medalists can only be correctly interpreted as medals in a truncated Olympic Games where the world's greatest sporting nations were not allowed to participate

The future Olympic participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes is hex-

treely uncertain. The most likely scenario at the moment is that, as long as the conflict continues, the exclusion of the national teams will remain in place. The situation of individual neutral athletes may also be under constant review.

If the expected peace does not materialise, the number of competing countries could be temporarily reduced. However, it should be noted that international sport is quite dynamic. The most important thing now is to bring about peace as soon as possible, which would also help sportsmen and women to regain their rightful place on the international stage.

Overall, the full participation of both Russia and Belarus would have had a significant impact on the medal table for the 2024 Paris Olympics. Russia would probably have finished in the top half with more gold medals, while Belarus would have finished in the middle with more medals. Competition in individual sports could have been different. The final medal table would therefore look very different from the one we have today.

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