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Equal Opportunities and Sport Regulation in the Context of Conflicts, Crises and Wars, Part 2

Proposed Solutions for Safeguarding Athletes within the Olympic Movement Amidst Geopolitical Changes

Abstract

In recent decades, the world of sport has increasingly become an arena of conflict between religious, political and economic interests during various crises. Drawing on historical experience, the authors attempt to define crisis situations in sport and present a comprehensive practical management model that can guide decision-makers and sports institutions. The study aims to contribute to developing a concept of sport that, amidst current global challenges, prioritises fairness for the Olympic Movement while primarily representing the interests of athletes. Using a military science approach, the authors first define various crises that occur in sport. Then they formulate practical solutions for managing conflict, crisis and war situations, based on solutions that are free from double standards and uphold the principle of equal opportunities. It is through the consistent application of adequate regulatory principles that sport can become a peaceful arena, which also safeguards the interests of sportsmen and sportswomen, while representing justice. To ensure comprehensive highest-level security during an Olympic event, close cooperation among military, law enforcement and counterterrorism units, as well as between civil and military national security services, is essential for the host country.

Keywords: war, equal opportunities, regulation, solution proposals, International Olympic Committee

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Introduction

Amidst the global changes and geopolitical shifts we are currently experiencing, sports regulations are also facing increasingly complex challenges. It has become crucial for top-level sports management to respond to every new conflict, crisis and war situation in a timely, systematic and scientifically sound manner. One such priority is safeguarding equal opportunities for athletes, which is strategically important not only for social justice but also for organisational efficiency and legitimacy.

We aim to utilise historical and current examples to demonstrate that the connection between sport and politics has been intertwined countless times throughout history. The detailed analysis of the cases and practical examples in our study highlights where and how athletes' equal opportunities can be violated in various ways.

Building on this, a complex, interdisciplinary approach forms the basis for the proposed solutions in this study. The aim of the proposed solutions is not only to ensure equal treatment, but also to create an adaptive and resilient system capable of maintaining fairness for all athletes and those working within the sports system in the face of future threats.

We have outlined solutions that guarantee, during a crisis in sports of varying intensity, that international sports federations and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) have the tools to prioritise athletes over political considerations and provide equitable opportunities for competition. To this end, our article demonstrates the impact of war and crises on athletes involved. We have summarised athletes' participation opportunities from past events.

Recognising the importance of defining and categorising the types of conflicts that occur in sport, we have created a precise categorisation, building on past events and experience, while applying a military science approach. Following the creation of an accurate categorisation, our outlined solutions take a comprehensive approach to protect all athletes and ensure equal opportunities.

Overview of the impact of war and crises on sport

Crises and wars often have not only a regional but also a worldwide impact. In sports, such events often affect athletes in the most painful way, denying them the opportunity to compete at the level for which they have fairly worked and qualified for.

Based on several past events, Table 1 summarises the effects of war and crises on athletes by showing the forms of participation of sanctioned athletes and the extent of the effect on the athletes. It also summarises the number of such cases, as well as the number of events in which they occurred. Some events are listed in multiple categories in the table, as the decisions had different effects on team and individual athletes or because different types of crises arose at a single event. These are identified by a brief description of the events in the detail's column.

Regarding the effect on athletes, three categories were established based on the following criteria.

1. High: Effects on athletes

The impact on athletes is considered high when athletes from a specific country cannot compete in a sporting event they have qualified for based on their performance, or are unable to take part in qualifying events, due to circumstances beyond their control.

Such cases include boycotts imposed on a country or based on a decision taken by a country, as well as disqualification, bans and collective sanctions, all of which can seriously impact athletes. In many cases, this results in permanent consequences, particularly in the lives of athletes competing during that time.

2. Moderate: Effects on athletes

The impact on athletes can be regarded as moderate when decisions or events lead to limited participation or participation with a neutral status. These may have occurred during political conflicts but ultimately still enabled athletes to take part in some way.

3. Low: Effects on athletes

The impact on athletes can be considered low when a competitor's participation is assured based on their performance, but there remains a slight risk that, for reasons beyond their control or due to a lack of appropriate regulations, the rules may change against them in the future. Uncertainty accompanies the athlete's preparation throughout. One of the main sources of uncertainty is the potential for ad hoc decisions by decision-makers. This includes, for example, when an athlete is denied an entry permit by a qualifying competition organiser while not being excluded from the international competition system, thereby preventing them from participating in a specific event, although there is a replacement option. It also covers cases where an athlete chooses not to participate in an event on moral, ideological, or religious grounds.

In principle, both individual and team athletes may take part in the Olympic Games according to the Olympic Charter. Table 2 summarises the cases discussed in this article, showing the different participation options for athletes with special status and the distinctions among various categories of athletes. The table outlines various cases of athletes' appearances, the use of national symbols, and the eligibility differences between team and individual athletes.

Table 1: Summarising the effects of war and crises on athletes

Type of effect on athletes	Number of cases (No. of events)	Governing decisions (IOC or national level)	Form of participation for sanctioned athletes	Events (year, location)	Brief description
High impact on the athletes involved	22 (20)	Direct bans, boycotts, or exclusions; discriminatory or politically motivated decisions. Strict IOC intervention or suspension	No participation, complete ban	1920 Antwerp	Complete exclusion of Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Germany and Turkey from participation
				1924 Paris	Political sanctions directly affected the participation of all German athletes
				The period of World War II	The Olympics did not take place for 12 years
				1956 Melbourne	Boycotts due to Soviet intervention
				1962 Asian Games, Jakarta	Israeli and Taiwanese athletes were refused visas
				1964 Tokyo	IOC exclusion, sanctions against Indonesia
					North Korea boycott
					Apartheid results in South Africa's exclusion
				1968 Mexico City	Apartheid meant South Africa was still banned
				1976 Montreal	A boycott by 22 African countries
				1980 Moscow	65 countries boycotted the Games
				1984 Los Angeles	Boycott by the Soviet Union and most of its allies. (Romania did not participate in the boycott.)
				1986 Edinburgh (British Commonwealth Games)	Boycott by 32 countries
				1986 Asian Games	Boycott and terrorist threats lead several countries to abstain
				1988 Seoul	Boycott by North Korea and its allies
				1992 Barcelona	Yugoslavia was banned from taking part in any team sports
				2000 Sydney	Afghan athlete banned by IOC
				2016 Rio de Janeiro	No team athletes allowed to compete from Kuwait
				2020 Tokyo / Covid-19 pandemic	North Korea did not send athletes to the event due to the pandemic. IOC issues suspension based on a decision under the Charter
				2022 Beijing	North Korea remains banned
				The early phase of the 2022 Russian–Ukrainian war outbreak	Russian and Belarusian athletes banned from international competition
				2024 Paris	Russian and Belarusian team athletes are still unable to compete due to the ban

Type of effect on athletes	Number of cases (No. of events)	Governing decisions (IOC or national level)	Form of participation for sanctioned athletes	Events (year, location)	Brief description
Moderate consequences on athletes concerned	8 (6)	Partial or procedural IOC actions, delayed or conditional decisions, temporary suspensions	Restricted participation, independent or neutral athletes allowed; selective bans	1992 Barcelona	Yugoslav individual athletes were allowed to participate as Independent Olympic Participants
				2000 Sydney	IOC allows athletes from East Timor to participate
				2008 Beijing	Situation with Iraq NOC stabilised before the start of the Olympic Games
				2016 Rio de Janeiro	Individual athletes from Kuwait are allowed to participate The Russian doping scandal led the IOC to reject a blanket ban in favour of a case-by-case eligibility review. Some athletes who were initially excluded were later reinstated
				2018 PyeongChang	Russian athletes could compete under strict conditions
				2020 Tokyo / Covid-19 pandemic	Doping scandal persisted following the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) case. Russian athletes could only participate in international competitions in neutral status
Low effect on athletes impacted	7 (7)	Minimal or no IOC or national level action. Symbolic or contextual responses only	Geopolitical and sports diplomatic tensions are occurring, but regular participation	1936 Berlin	North Korea does not send athletes due to Covid Some American Jewish athletes boycotted the Games
				1992 Barcelona	IOC granted provisional recognition to several new national Olympic committees following Soviet Union collapse
				2008 Beijing	During the Russian–Georgian war, the IOC did not impose sanctions
				2014: Annexation of the Crimean Peninsula	The IOC did not impose any sanctions
				2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi	State-sponsored doping programme occurring in Russia did not have effect on this event
				2016 Rio de Janeiro	Individual athletes from Kuwait were allowed to participate
				2022 Beijing	Diplomatic boycott over China's human rights issues

Source: compiled by the authors based on the reviewed literature

Table 2: Summary table of athletes' participating opportunities

	IOP (Independent Olympic Participant) or IOA (Independent Olympic Athlete)		OAR (Olympic Athlete from Russia)	Representing the National Olympic Committee (e.g. ROC – Russian Olympic Committee Athletes)	AIN (Individual Neutral Athletes)	Complete ban
Event	1992 Yugoslavia sanctioned	2000 Sydney: East Timor, where the Olympic Committee had not yet been established. 2012 London: The case of the South Sudanese runner. 2016 Rio: Kuwait's National Olympic Committee was suspended	2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics: conditions imposed on Russian athletes	2020 Tokyo	2024 Sanctions affecting the Paris Olympics during the Russian– Ukrainian war	1920 Antwerp, 1924 Paris, (2022 Russian– Ukrainian initial ban)
Basis for the decision	The result of the UN Security Council resolution	Temporary governmental or political reasons, or the absence or suspension of the National Olympic Committee	Collective sanctions resulting from the Russian doping scandal	Based on the principles for implementing CAS rulings (WADA v. RUSADA)	Political, war or ethical sanctions – individual assessment of Russian and Belarusian athletes	War sanctions
The athlete's appearance	In neutral uniforms (white jerseys) bearing the Olympic symbol. No national identification		'Olympic athletes from Russia' 'outfits	The words "Russian Olympic Committee" must be completely removed from the uniform or replaced with the abbreviation ROC	AIN – completely individual, country-neutral	No participation available
Are individual athletes permitted?	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Are team athletes permitted?	No		Yes (e.g. men's ice hockey, curling)	Yes	No	No

	IOP (Independent Olympic Participant) or IOA (Independent Olympic Athlete)	OAR (Olympic Athlete from Russia)	Representing the National Olympic Committee (e.g. ROC – Russian Olympic Committee Athletes)	AIN (Individual Neutral Athletes)	Complete ban
Can you display the name of the country?	No	The name "Russia" appeared in the name, as "Olympic Athletes from Russia"	No, the ROC designation may be used	No, it was forbidden to display the country's name in any form	No participation available
Hymn, flag	Olympic flag, Olympic anthem	They could compete under the Olympic flag. Only the Olympic anthem was permitted to be played at the ceremonies	The flag could not be displayed. The Russian Olympic Committee emblem had to be used. The anthem was not allowed to be played; instead, Pyotr Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto was performed during ceremonies	No national anthem or flag permitted	No participation available
Qualification requirements	Fulfilment of qualification requirements	Sports qualification requirements and compliance. No doping, clean record based on WADA criteria	Requirements and completion for sports qualification	Sports qualification criteria and compliance. Could not be affiliated with any organisation that supported war, ethical screening, and other requirements	No participation available
Administrative background	IOC coordination. Even without national-level support, IOC remained involved	The list of invitees had to be compiled by a committee chaired by the ITA President and comprising representatives of relevant organisations. [World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), IOC, Doping Free Sports Unit (DFSU)]	Athletes were nominated and represented by the Russian Olympic Committee	The affairs of AIN athletes and their staff was managed collaboratively by the organisers of the 2024 Paris Olympic Games, the relevant international sports federation, and the IOC	No

Source: compiled by the authors based on International Olympic Committee 1992; 3; International Olympic Committee 2023d; 2; International Olympic Committee 2017; International Olympic Committee 2021; International Olympic Committee 2022; International Olympic Committee 2023a; International Olympic Committee 2023b; Multikor 2020; NÉMETH 2012

Proposed solutions

It is very important for the Olympic movement that as many countries as possible participate in the Games, thereby fulfilling the Charter's obligation for NOCs to send athletes to the Olympic Games.⁴ Diversity is therefore also vital to the movement, which is maintained by the participation of different nations. Nationality is a key part of an individual's identity, so athletes cannot be separated from this connection with their country.

The Olympic Refugee Team (ORT) is a noble initiative and a significant support for athletes. However, even within this framework, the solution for athletes without nationality remains only temporary. A clear example is Alizadeh Kimia, a former Iranian citizen who competed as part of the ORT at the Tokyo Olympics but represented another country, Bulgaria, at the 2024 Paris Games.⁵

To develop a solution, the authors first created a table illustrating the gradual spread of crisis in sport, then devised procedural recommendations for each phase, including the introduction of the status of Athletes from Crisis Situations (ACS) or the creation of a Special Olympic Visa (SOV).

The gradual spread of crisis in sport

The historical overview also demonstrates that sanctions imposed during war and crises have generally been ineffective and often quite damaging to athletes. Instead of sanctions, the IOC should develop procedures that are reliably effective in various situations.

PEACE-1	CONFLICT	CRISIS	WAR	STABILISATION	PEACE-2
During this period, the Olympic Movement's daily activities, programmes with athletes, "normal" structured entry processes, and qualification system etc. are in place	These are situations that require special attention to prevent the problem from escalating from a conflict into a crisis that affects sports more deeply	This is any situation that deviates from normal operations and affects sports and athletes to be a crisis. A crisis in sport can occur due to events in the global political environment or violations of sports regulations. Only events that disrupt sports rules and the internal functioning of the Olympic movement qualify as crises under this approach	This category includes world wars, as well as instances where a NOC's country participating in the Olympic movement is at war. Furthermore, included in this category are occasions when the host country, as the venue, poses a security risk due to a war	In the context of sport, stabilisation does not refer to the period after the war, but rather to the period following a crisis. We define stabilisation as everything the IOC does to restore the situation that existed before the crisis	After stabilisation, the Olympic movement returned to a state where, according to Peace-1, a "normal" structured entry and qualification system, etc., are in place

Figure 1: The gradual spread of crisis in sport
Source: compiled by the authors

⁴ International Olympic Committee 2025a: 61.

⁵ International Olympic Committee [s. a.a].

To achieve this, we must first define what we consider to be peace, conflict, crisis and war in sport. To assist with this, the authors drew on Resperger's diagram entitled "Actions and their intensity" found in his work.⁶ Based on this, they created a diagram called "the gradual spread of crisis in sport".

Peace 1

During the Peace 1 period, nominations, participation and competition are governed by the Charter. For example, national Olympic committees nominate competitors who meet the technical requirements for the event set by the international sports federations (IFs) (qualification). In the final step, the IOC and the international sports federations approve the nominations.

Conflict

During conflicts, athletes may still compete under normal conditions and entry options which are available during peacetime, but some situations demand special attention to stop the issue from escalating into a crisis.

Identified situations based on past events:

1. Addressing institutional and individual corruption
IOC, NOCs, IFs and other organisations participating in the movement.
Solution: examine the possibility of curbing and/or suspending corruption, unfair play, cheating, sports betting
Solution: curbing corruption and/or examining the possibility of suspension
2. Migration/change of country
The number of athletes changing countries and the increase in this number.
Solution: Charter guidelines already exist for this
3. Doping disputes
The involvement of athletes, organisations, coaches and other members of the movement in doping cases.
Solution: Compliance with WADA regulations, escalation of conflicts to CAS or higher levels of dispute resolution (Swiss Federal Supreme Court, ECtHR⁷)
4. Other conflicts in sports
This category includes all other conflicts that pose a significant threat to athletes in terms of equality. Due to the changing global environment, other types of conflicts that are currently unknown may arise in sport in the future.
Solution: Sport should strive to prevent conflict from becoming a crisis. It can use a number of tools to achieve this, such as various community-building programmes (see Olympic truce), and the use of preventive diplomatic tools is also essential. One example is the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

⁶ RESPERGER 2018: 14.

⁷ European Court of Human Rights.

Crisis

A crisis is considered any situation that significantly deviates from the Peace 1 scenario and impacts sport and athletes. A crisis in sport can occur due to events in the global political environment or as a result of violations of sports regulations. Other worldwide events that threaten sporting events are not included in this approach (e.g. terrorist attacks, demonstrations, etc.). Only events that disrupt sports regulations and the internal functioning of the Olympic movement are classified as crises in this context.

Identified situations based on past events:

1. Intergovernmental organisation (IGO) level bans on sports (e.g. ban on Yugoslavia)
Solution: The power of sports diplomacy and negotiations
2. Suspension of National Olympic Committees or other members of the Movement for breaches of the Charter
Solution: Alternative entry option, ACS status and SOV visa option, explained below
3. A boycott originating from a country
Solution: As a non-governmental actor, the IOC cannot influence the decisions of sovereign countries. The IOC may operate with the cooperation of intergovernmental actors to facilitate diplomacy
4. Suspensions for doping offences (individual doping offences are not included here)
Solution: Elimination of collective punishment; consistent punishment for offenders
5. The impact of global crises (embargoes, blockades) on sport
Solution: Alternative registration option, ACS status and SOV visa option, outlined below
6. Other crises in sport
Due to the altered global environment, further unspecified crises may also arise in sport in the future.
Solution: An alternative entry option and ACS status should be provided, as detailed below

As part of the Olympic movement, the IOC may take the necessary measures and impose sanctions against the relevant national Olympic committee or international sports federations (NGO-2-NGO⁸), but it may not do so against countries by targeting athletes (complete withdrawal of flags and anthems).

War

Historically, World War II had the greatest impact on sport, resulting in a prolonged shutdown. Human life is more important than anything else, so in the event of a global

⁸ Cooperation between non-governmental organisations.

war, suspension is recommended. Furthermore, if a war occurs in a specific Olympic area, suspension is recommended in all cases.

Local wars have impacted sport in various ways. For instance, the Georgian–Russian war shows a very different scenario from the Russian–Ukrainian conflict. Nevertheless, the Olympic Charter offers no specific rules for wartime situations. The decisions made by the IOC have often been harmful to athletes. Therefore, in the event of war between two or more countries, the authors recommend that the IOC avoid becoming a political actor and refrain from taking a stance.

In the event of war, a non-political approach and neutral stance are advised for the IOC. Sanctions, bans and excessive restrictions imposed on athletes due to war mainly impact their sporting careers, while having minimal impact on the warring country. However, they have a particularly negative impact on the Olympic movement itself, especially the Olympic Games. As an additional effect, the IOC's neutral approach can also reduce the significance and influence of Olympic boycotts by removing the movement and the Games from the political arena and emphasising the noble nature of sport.

The Olympic Charter is a regulatory document adopted by the IOC that is binding on the Olympic Movement and its organisations (such as National Olympic Committees and international federations, etc.), but it is not an international treaty signed by states.⁹ In this context, we would like to emphasise our recommendation that the IOC should adopt a unified and apolitical approach, free of double standards, during a war period.

Solution: In the event of war, if the event in question is not suspended and no sanctions have been imposed during the crisis period, operations shall continue as normal under Peace 1 status.

In the event of war, the IOC cannot enforce sanctions on countries or their athletes. This genuinely elevates sport above politics.

Stabilisation

During this period, the IOC is working to restore the situation that arose during the crisis and to resume operations following its suspension due to the war.

Examples include restoring the status of suspended sports organisations, recruiting new members, and organising preventative peace-building programmes in which the network of organisations involved in the movement can be very helpful.

Solution: During this period, crisis-like procedures should be established. In the event of a restart, the Peace 1 procedure is recommended.

Peace 2

Normal “everyday” operation similar to Peace 1 status.

⁹ GARCIA-MEIER 2022.

Athlete statuses

In the past, different athlete statuses, such as complete exclusion, neutral status, limited participation and normal national representation, have always depended on the complexity of the case, its political and legal nature, the will of major powers, and the moral and diplomatic context of the IOC's decision, due to the lack of uniform regulations. The characteristics of the ACS status applied during the crisis are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: ACS status characteristics

	Athletes from Crisis Situations (ACS)	Reasons for recommendations
Occurrence / history	In the event of a crisis, it shall apply universally to all sports events overseen by the IOC and IFs	Avoiding double standards and ensuring predictability for athletes and the Olympic movement. It can also be viewed as a preventive measure
The athlete's appearance (individual and team sports)	Neutral (white) Olympic athlete uniform with the athlete's national flag, which may be positioned above the heart in the specified size	Part of an individual's identity is their national affiliation and the right to it. Furthermore, sport promotes peace by highlighting that sanctions are not the solution, as they have not resulted in lasting results in the past
Are individual athletes allowed?	Yes	All athletes can participate based on the results they reached during the qualification period
Are team sports allowed?	Yes	
Can you name the country?	No, he, she or the team is listed as an athlete or team with ACS status	A compromise solution that shows a non-discriminatory attitude by the IOC, respecting individuals' rights to belong to a country and to wear its symbols
National anthem	Yes, only the national anthem of the athlete or team may be played in the event of victory	
Flag	Only on neutral (white) Olympic uniforms, symbolically, on the front, above the heart, in the form of a small flag	
Qualification requirements	International Sports Federation regulations and performance-based competition system	Athletes cannot be affiliated with organisations that support war, as they personally adhere to the Olympic Charter
Administrative background	Based on the entry formula developed for crises, with an SOV visa	A uniform system for everyone, with no double standards or special conditions

Source: compiled by the authors

The cases presented in this article and Table 2, which summarises the athletes' eligibility to compete, show that the IOC's suspension practice is inconsistent and affects athletes differently. The most severe outcome is total exclusion, when athletes from a given country are entirely barred from participating in the Games (e.g. Indonesia, apartheid-era South Africa). In other cases, however, the IOC permits neutral participation, where athletes are not allowed to display their national affiliation, but their

individual rights remain protected in accordance with the Olympic ideal. The Charter details possible sanctions and the process for imposing them, but does not specify the use of national symbols such as uniforms, flags, anthems, etc. Decisions on these matters are left to the discretion of the Executive Board.¹⁰

Solution: Establishment of the aforementioned ACS status and SOV visa option.

Entry procedure for athletes in the event of a conflict

In times of crisis, it is particularly important to have a transparent alternative qualification system that gives all athletes a fair chance to participate if they qualify.

Under the Charter, National Olympic Committees hold exclusive responsibility for representing their countries. They are the bodies that submit entries and select athletes for the Olympic Games. This means that athletes' eligibility to participate is generally linked to the status and recognition of their own National Olympic Committee.¹¹ At the same time, past events have shown that it is impossible to predict in advance whether a solution that puts the interests of athletes first will prevail in the event of the suspension of a National Olympic Committee. The Charter should therefore specify the procedure to be followed in relation to athletes in crisis situations. The participation of athletes must be guaranteed uniformly, regardless of the country, and with the recognition of the Charter, it is also mandatory for IFs to ensure athletes' participation in qualifying competitions in all aspects.

Below, we make specific proposals for entry options which, following further elaboration, will ensure that qualified athletes can participate in the Games without disruption in the event of any crisis.

1. If the National Olympic Committee of a specific country is suspended by the IOC. The IOC EB shall, in each case, determine the consequences for the NOC and athletes concerned.¹² However, the current procedure leaves room for different interpretations, which could even lead to double standards.

Solution: Entries shall be made to the International Federation (IF) for the sport in question.

For individual athletes, entries may be submitted by the national federation for the relevant sport.

For team athletes/teams, entries may be submitted by the national federation for the sport in question.

2. If the national sports federation of a given country is suspended or ceases to exist for other reasons and becomes unable to function.

Solution: If a national sports federation ceases to exist and is not replaced by a new one, the national Olympic committee of the country concerned shall be entitled to enter both individual and team sports in the same way as under normal circumstances. The entry for nomination towards the NOC shall be submitted in the following manner:

¹⁰ International Olympic Committee 2025a: 106.

¹¹ International Olympic Committee 2025a.

¹² International Olympic Committee 2025a: 106.

For individual sports: athletes can enter themselves directly to their national Olympic committee, which works according to standard operating procedures. For team sports: the technical director of the relevant sports federation and the team captain of the national team, acting jointly, are eligible to enter a team. If the two persons are responsible for the dissolution of the national federation, a representative delegated by the NOC shall be entitled to select at least two, but no more than three, persons who shall be eligible to enter a team.

3. If both the national sports federation and the National Olympic Committee of the country concerned are suspended at the same time, the athlete shall be eligible to enter.

Solution: In this case, entries should also be sent to the International Federation (IF) for the relevant sport.

In the case of individual sports, athletes are eligible to enter themselves, as well as the athlete's club.

In the case of team sports, the following persons are entitled to enter a team: the technical director of the relevant sports federation in the country at the time of termination and the team captain of the national team. If the two persons are responsible for the dissolution, the representative delegated by the sports IF shall be entitled to select at least two, but no more than three, persons who shall be eligible to enter a team.

4. If an IF recognised by the IOC is suspended, the Charter shall specify the measures to be taken.¹³ If this occurs immediately before the games, an exceptional situation arises, such as the situation that arose with boxers before the 2024 Paris Olympics.¹⁴

Solution: A possible solution would be that, until the suspended sports organisation regains its status or the IOC recognises another international organisation governing the sport, the IOC would assume the role of the IF (in terms of both professional and qualification competition organisation). Currently, neither the material nor the professional conditions for this are fully established. Due to space limitations, this article does not explore this in detail; further research is advised on this subject, with an emphasis on the Paris Olympics and the situation with AIBA¹⁵ and World Boxing.

In the early days of the modern Olympic Games, before the establishment of national Olympic committees, there were several ways to qualify. The examples listed above show how important this was for the athletes.

Special Olympic Visa (SOV)

Certain IFs, as well as the IOC, have established guarantees for host nations regarding their respective events, which also require governmental approval. One such guarantee

¹³ International Olympic Committee 2025a: 104.

¹⁴ International Olympic Committee 2023c.

¹⁵ Association Internationale de Boxe Amateur.

pertains to the visa requirement, intended to prevent host countries from excluding participants from the event. To this end, measures are implemented to ensure that hosts do not exclude specific individuals or nations.¹⁶

Despite the IOC's stance expressed on multiple occasions, in 2025, there remained instances in which athletes from specific nations were unable to participate in events for which they had qualified due to visa refusals. Such was the situation in Indonesia, at the 2025 International Gymnastics Federation (Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique – FIG¹⁷) Artistic World Championships, where Indonesia denied visas to Israeli gymnastics athletes, team members and officials, thereby preventing their entry into the country for the event.¹⁸

The IOC should require recognised international sports organisations to include a visa issue clause in their event host contracts. If there is a breach of this clause, the given IF should be obliged to postpone the event until a suitable host country is found. This measure would genuinely ensure compliance with the conditions and protect athletes from discrimination by obliging the host countries to meet the necessary requirements. This commitment should also be established as an obligatory condition (not a recommendation) for all IFs recognised by the IOC for the global events they organise.

No nation can be compelled to organise sporting events; however, if a country chooses to do so, it must adhere to the accompanying obligations. Only through consistent, transparent and robust leadership can sport guarantee that its events are not exploited for negative political purposes. The authors believe that athletes deserve a separate category regarding visas; therefore, in a case where their countries' NOCs are suspended, athletes would still have a clear and secure opportunity to compete at an event.

Safeguarding athletes' entry options to international sporting events could be achieved by granting qualified competitors and their immediate staff a "Special Olympic Visa (SOV)" for visa and entry into the host country during the Olympic Games, under an agreement with the host country, subject to conditions applicable to all. The specific conditions for entry are the responsibility of the host country, but steps taken by the IOC in this direction could yield significant results in terms of sports diplomacy. This initiative can be interpreted as a sports version of the golden visa,¹⁹ which could provide security for both the IOC and all countries regarding the participation of athletes. An extended version of this should be implemented by all IFs, nominally Special Athlete Visa (SAV), with the same intention of ensuring equal opportunity for qualified athletes at an international sporting event. Such a measure would clearly safeguard athletes' interests during global armed conflicts and successfully elevate competitors above politics.

¹⁶ TRUNKOS–HEERE 2017.

¹⁷ The governing body for Gymnastics worldwide recognised by the IOC.

¹⁸ International Olympic Committee 2025b.

¹⁹ NÉMETH 2024.

Conclusion

The historical retrospective provided in this article shows that wars and conflicts are present and may develop into armed conflicts, even in the 21st century. The IOC currently does not address war as a phenomenon at the level of its procedures, but considers sport as a tool for peace. In order to be able to represent this credibly, it would also be necessary to establish specific rules and procedures for the Olympics in the event of war, which could serve as an example for other sports organisations that are members. It is not enough to take a stand and regulate what is done for peace; it is also essential to regulate what is done in the event of war.

Our article shows that, over the past decades, the IOC's response and actions to conflict situations have been ad hoc, depending on the current geopolitical context. The International Olympic Committee should strive to ensure that world events do not affect individual and team athletes' chances of competing.

The Olympic truce once served as a more practical tool, and even then, it was not always successful. In today's international environment, with many nations and stakeholders involved, the question arises whether the tradition in its current form is sustainable or could be an obstacle to the principle of non-discrimination. If maintaining only this truce, without regulations about wartime, remains a priority, then the Games will keep taking on an unwanted political role. This will inevitably lead to discrimination, such as the decisions taken against the Olympic Charter in the case of Russian and Belarusian athletes in 2022, or the lack of opportunities for certain team athletes to compete in neutral colours at the 2024 Olympics. Instead of focusing solely on the "idea" of a truce, a more effective and safer approach for athletes would be to establish specific procedures to be used at different stages of a conflict, a crisis, or a war, while the idea itself could still act as a form of preventive diplomatic tool in sport.

The IOC has a duty to ensure that athletes are not disadvantaged in this way. If it prepares for war situations in advance with comprehensive regulations, incorporating good practices from the past into its procedures, then, in the event of a conflict, the IOC would be able to say it has succeeded in providing political neutrality, setting an example to other sports organisations. It is worth taking into account the ideas of Liddell Hart, who considered that the basis of preparation lies in understanding the theory and historical experience of such warfare and the particular situation in which the combat is taking place or is likely to break out.²⁰

At the level of principles, the IOC is a good advocate of, among other things, equal opportunities and non-discrimination. In most cases, it operates according to specific procedures and regulations. But the issue of conflict and war is now inescapable and cannot be addressed in the future without fundamental principles that prevent athletes from being disadvantaged. The outbreak of the war between Russia and Ukraine was an example of the IOC's willingness to deviate from its basic principles. As a result of this, Russian and Belarusian athletes were disadvantaged, in violation of the principle

²⁰ LIDDELL HART 1991: 365.

of equal opportunities. To prevent this from happening in the future, the IOC should propose a specific set of procedures for all types of conflict, crisis and war situations.

Trump and Putin's hockey initiative may indicate that prominent political leaders could be open to putting sport above politics. At least the example shows that sport should be used as a positive tool, and no athletes should be penalised because their country is at war. In an interview the newly elected IOC president, Kirsty Coventry, expressed her point of view on athlete equality. Although she did not talk about the context of the war, but rather took a stand on doping, Coventry stressed the importance of treating everyone equally, otherwise the integrity of the organisation would be called into question.²¹ It is worth putting her thoughts into the context of sport and war. Several world and sports organisation leaders seem to share the same vision on equal opportunities for athletes. Therefore, the timing would be ideal to start working on a global conflict policy to ensure an equal, level playing field for all.

The IOC is the highest body for the Olympic movement, and it is therefore the IOC's duty to establish these rules and procedures. The IOC cannot pass this responsibility on to the NOCs and the IFs. As the supreme authority of sport, it must work out how, in future, sport can 'stay out' of global conflicts, resist becoming a tool of hybrid warfare, and ensure equal opportunities for athletes at the Olympics. Furthermore, it is important to find a role in which it fairly represents sport to all stakeholders within its remit as an international actor, but not as an intergovernmental organisation.

Our article examines the IOC's reactions and decisions in conflict situations, but it should also be remembered that the state has a major influence and responsibility towards its athletes. For example, if a country boycotts a sporting event, it is that country that is accountable to its athletes. While respecting the role of states, IOC regulations must uphold the principle of neutrality, ensuring athletes are never forced to decide between representing their nation and participating in the Olympic Games.

Finally, it is also important to highlight the opportunities for athletes in a team. The current efforts to address this are mainly focused on individual athletes, and unfortunately, less attention is paid to team sports. The authors' proposed solutions also addressed team sports, as this cannot be ignored in the final regulations.

The International Olympic Committee website states: "The athletes are at the heart of the Olympic Movement."²² Furthermore, according to the Charter, the IOC regards the Olympic Games as competitions between individual athletes or teams, not between nations.²³ In this light, the organisation should strive to ensure that athletes are and will be the first priority in complex geopolitical situations, as they are the most valuable and central element of the Olympic movement. With sufficiently detailed and comprehensive policies and regulations, all actors involved in the sport system win. Where the athletes' results qualify them, their participation should be guaranteed.

According to Pope Leo XIV, serving the community's interests and protecting the vulnerable and marginalised is a fundamental duty, as ongoing injustice can easily

²¹ Csisztu Channel 2025.

²² International Olympic Committee [s. a. b].

²³ International Olympic Committee 2025a: 18.

lead to violence and subsequently to war.²⁴ The Olympic movement emphasises community, particularly the athletes themselves. Consequently, decisions that discriminate against them or are overly harsh or disproportionate often lead to frustration and personal hurt, which can escalate into hostility or even hatred. A more moderate, proportionate and transparent approach to conflict management, combined with empathy and preventative measures, would prove more effective in the long run, as it would help prevent personal resentment and support the maintenance of peaceful and constructive competition.

The IOC's future regulations to protect athletes' equal opportunities during times of conflict, crisis and war are a future direction that is independent of countries. However, it is equally important for nations to safeguard their own athletes and provide conditions under which they can safely participate in global sporting events. In doing so, they become partners in elevating sport above politics and creating an arena where, despite global turmoil, cooperation and peace can be fostered. Regarding a host nation for the Olympic Games, it is vital to establish comprehensive cooperation within the organising country's security system. This includes collaboration between the Military and Law Enforcement, as well as different agencies working together, such as the Counter-Terrorism Centre (TEK) and Civil National Security Services²⁵ all providing the highest level of security for organising the Olympic event.

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²⁴ Vatican News 2025.

²⁵ Civil National Security Services [s. a.].

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Abbreviations

AIBA – Association Internationale de Boxe Amateur
 AIN – Individual Neutral Athletes
 ACS – Athletes from Crisis Situations
 CAS – Court of Arbitration for Sport
 ECtHR – The European Court of Human Rights
 FIG – Internationale de Gymnastique
 IGO – Intergovernmental Organisation
 IOC – International Olympic Committee
 IOC EB – International Olympic Committee Executive Board
 IOP – Independent Olympic Participant
 NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation
 QAR – Olympic Athlete from Russia
 ROC – Russian Olympic Committee
 RUSADA – Russian Anti-Doping Agency
 SOV – Special Olympic Visa
 SAV – Special Athlete Visa
 WADA – World Anti-Doping Agency