

Evaluation of Pre-conflict International Olympic Committee Actions against Russia for Doping Violations

By Raymond Stefani*

It is sadly ironic that in ancient Greece, wars were stopped for the Olympics, whereas during the period of the Olympic Truce for the 2022 Beijing Olympics and Paralympics, Russia began an armed incursion into Ukraine. For some time to come, Russia will suffer serious sanctions against competing in the Olympics and in many other international competitions. When Russia is again allowed to compete in the Olympics, there will remain the issue of insuring that the Russian athletes are no longer gaining an advantage by taking performance-enhancing drugs. Although it would seem that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has been punishing Russia for its past doping transgressions, most of the IOC actions were not sanctions at all, based on the Olympic Charter. However, some previous actions were punitive and could force compliance if reinstated and increased. The Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) should be disenfranchised. Russian athletes should compete simply as Olympic Athletes with no mention of Russia and no medal table should include Russian-earned medals. The IOC should exercise its ability to screen all Russian athletes for past and present use of performance-enhancing drugs. Further, Russia should not compete in team sports until there is compliance with anti-drug standards.

Keywords: anti-doping, Russian sports doping, medals stripped, IOC sanctions

Introduction

In the latter stages of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, medal competitions and background stories had to share media attention with a doping issue regarding a 15-year-old Russian figure skater, Kamila Valieva. She had been expected to be a multiple-medal winner, which seemed to be validated by her high-scoring performance in the team figure skating event. Russia won, under the designation Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) as will be discussed shortly. As is true for all medal winners, she was tested for performance-enhancing drugs. She tested negative. However, one day later, a report was forwarded by a Swedish laboratory, indicating that her sample taken on 25 December 2021 at a Russian competition had tested positive for a banned substance, trimetazidine. That drug is taken by heart patients suffering from angina. The increased blood flow to the heart mitigates angina in legitimate patients, but it also increases stamina and energy output in athletes without heart problems. For example, the well-known Russian tennis player Maria Sharapova was suspended in 2016 for using a similar drug, meldonium, and the world record holding swimmer Sun Yang (China) was caught and suspended in 2014 for using trimetazidine. Many other athletes have tested

*Professor Emeritus, California State University, Long Beach, USA.

positive for one or the other of those two drugs and have been suspended accordingly.

For Valieva, there followed announced decisions and then appeals to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) as to what to do with the medals for the team skating competition (Russia remains the winner) and whether to allow Valieva to continue (which was allowed; but she could not take part in any award ceremony if she medalled). Angry discussions for and against the Russian sports system filled news reports in the latter days of the Games. Later, her Olympics ended sadly, probably induced by the disruptive anxiety caused by media coverage, with multiple falls in her last competition, no medal, much anguish and such cold responses from her Russian coaches that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) president, Thomas Bach, admonished that treatment at a press conference.

The purpose of this paper is to provide objectivity to this very sensitive issue. Russia's past doping record will be reviewed along with the IOC actions taken in response. The efficacy of those IOC responses will be evaluated objectively, using the IOC's Olympic Charter policies on competition as well as the resulting medal counts for Russian athletes in six Olympic Games. Having evaluated the efficacy of the stated sanctions, suggestions will be made for meaningful sanctioning, intended to reduce athlete abuse like that suffered by Valieva.

Russian Doping Violations

The official results for each of the past Olympics are available in IOC (2022), including the medal table for each Games. A careful examination of IOC (2022) as well as the World Anti-Doping Association (WADA) website resulted in Wikipedia (2022b), which contains a listing of each medal stripped, summarized by a table giving the total number of medals stripped from each nation.

Based on Wikipedia (2022b), Table 1 shows the total medals stripped from each nation for doping violations since the stripping of the first Olympic medal in 1968 through 15 May 2022. For the purposes of this study, the upper left section of Table 1 shows medals stripped from Russia and the other three designations under which Russia previously competed. Below that are the medals stripped from 10 former constituent Republics of the Soviet Union after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which was completed in 1991. All other stripped national medals then follow. Russia, competing under its various designations, has been responsible for 47 (30.5%) of all 154 medals stripped. Further, by including the 47 medals stripped from the 10 former Soviet Republics, the total rises to 94 medals, 61% of all.

With historical context, Table 1 provides insight into Cold-War-era doping activity as well as doping activity since the end of the Cold War. Alcohol abuse caused the first medal to be stripped in 1968 in the modern pentathlon. Some anti-doping activity followed through 1988, resulting in the stripping of just 16 of the 154 stripped medals in Table 1. When Ben Johnson of Canada won the 100 m run in 1988 and was famously caught with a steroid infused sample, he lost his medal,

the only medal lost by Canada, which then worked earnestly to stop doping violations.

Anti-doping methods were then dramatically increased after 1988. During the Cold War from 1947 to 1991, Western and Eastern Bloc nations considered success in Olympic and world competitions to be a national priority, at a time when only moderate anti-doping was applied. With the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, the former Soviet Republics then began competing under their own flags, thereafter incurring a total loss of the 47 medals mentioned above, indicating that their doping programs most likely began under the just-ended regime of the Soviet Union.

East Germany, competing under various designations, was a successful medal winner during the Cold War, also contested under moderate anti-doping protocols, which resulted in no doping violations. However, when the Berlin Wall came down in 1988, the extent of the East German doping program under Soviet domination became apparent. Ratermiller (2013) notes that the German government reimbursed 167 former athletes for health issues due to doping demands imposed on them under East German rule. Further, it is noted that the files of the former East German secret police, the Stasi, indicated that about 10,000 East German athletes were involved in some form of doping.

Table 1. *Olympic Medals Stripped from Each Country for Doping Violations from 1968 through 15 May 2022*

Country	G	S	B	Total	Country	G	S	B	Total
Russia	13	20	11	44	Spain	3	0	1	4
Olympic Athletes from Russia (OAR)	0	0	1	1	Hungary	2	2	0	4
Soviet Union	0	0	1	1	Romania	1	1	2	4
Unified Team	0	0	1	1	Germany	2	0	1	3
					Great Britain	0	1	2	3
Ukraine	2	4	5	11	Sweden	0	1	2	3
Belarus	2	3	6	11	North Korea	0	1	1	2
Kazakhstan	6	2	2	10	Greece	0	0	2	2
Uzbekistan	2	1	1	4	Bahrain	1	0	0	1
Armenia	0	0	3	3	Canada	1	0	0	1
Moldova	0	0	3	3	Ireland	1	0	0	1
Azerbaijan	0	1	1	2	Jamaica	1	0	0	1
Georgia	0	1	0	1	Poland	1	0	0	1
Lithuania	0	1	0	1	Cuba	0	1	0	1
Kyrgyzstan	0	0	1	1	Finland	0	1	0	1
					Italy	0	1	0	1
United States	5	1	2	8	Mongolia	0	1	0	1
Bulgaria	4	2	1	7	Netherlands	0	0	1	1
Turkey	1	4	0	5	Norway	0	0	1	1
China	3	0	1	4	Total	51	50	53	154

Clearly, Eastern Bloc nations employed performance-enhancing drugs as a widely used training aid during the Cold War and after. Western bloc nations had far less culpability. Consistently at or near the top of the medal table, the USA has had only eight medals stripped, which is less than for Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan. Other top Western Bloc medal winners have had few medals stripped: Great Britain (3) and Germany (3). China has had only 4 medals stripped. Clearly,

there is a huge gap between other sports powers and Russia as to the use of performance-enhancing drugs.

Additional Russian Doping Violations

Stefani (2017, 2018) contains studies of Russian doping. Wikipedia (2022a) contains a thorough examination of Russian doping transgression and actions taken against Russia, based on an annotated bibliography of 322 references, a truly comprehensive resource on that topic. For example, the Russian Anti-Doping Agency (RUSADA) replaced positive samples with negative ones, delayed sending reports and made reports unavailable to WADA. Russia also restricted WADA's access to athletes, samples and test results, while also failing to report or make available competition dates. Some locations of competitions and athletes subject to random testing were purposely incorrect. In 2016, the WADA-sponsored McLaren report indicated that more than 1000 Russian athletes had been part of a doping coverup. The McLaren report documented many additional doping transgressions.

IOC Actions in Response to Russian Doping Violations

From IOC (2022) and Wikipedia (2022a), IOC actions taken against Russia when doping violations became apparent were located and tabulated as follows. Prior to the 2016 Rio Summer Olympics, the IOC carefully reviewed Russian nominees and refused Olympic status to 111, leaving 282 athletes who competed for Russia. In 2017, the IOC suspended the ROC. For the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang, the IOC ruled that Russian athletes could not compete under the Russian flag but could compete under the Olympic flag as independent (neutral) athletes, designated Olympic Athletes from Russia (OAR). The 2018 process mirrored what was implemented in 2016: the IOC reviewed the nominated athletes (starting with about 500) eliminated 111, and after further scrutiny, permitted 168 to participate in the Games.

Prior to the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics, which would actually be held in 2021, the ROC was reinstated. The Russian athletes were informed they could not compete under the Russian flag, but could compete under the ROC banner and would be designated as ROC in competition, for which 335 athletes were accepted. Athletes could have "Russia" shown on their uniforms and some use of the Russian colors on their uniforms was allowed, Wikipedia (2022a). For the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, the exact same competitive conditions as in 2021 were imposed on Russia. A total of 211 athletes from Russia were approved by the IOC to compete.

Evaluation of IOC Actions

The official IOC rules of competition and the resulting medals earned will now be reviewed to objectively evaluate the strength of the above actions and to determine which actions could be called sanctions and which were not.

The Olympic Charter governs the Olympic movement and competition in the Olympic Games, IOC (2017). Rule 6 is titled Olympic Games and reads as follows. “The Olympic Games are competitions between athletes in individual or team events and not between countries. They bring together the athletes selected by their respective NOCs whose entries have been accepted by the IOC. They compete under the technical direction of the IFs concerned.” The abbreviation IF refers to the International Federation that governs each sport contested.

Since athletes do not compete for their country under Rule 6, it was not a sanction to tell Russia that their athletes could not compete under their flag and could not play the Russian anthem for gold medal winners. Those were simply elements of pageantry that had no connection with the actual conduct of the Games. Further, when Russia competed as the ROC in 2021 and 2022, those were not sanctions since all athletes compete for their NOCs, under Rule 6.

Table 2. *Russian Athletes’ Olympic Medals for 2012-2022, Taken from IOC (2022)*

Year	Location	IOC Designation For Russian Athletes	Athletes	Total Medal Position	Total Medals	G	S	B
Summer Olympics								
2012	London	Russian Federation	436	3	82	24	26	32
2016	Rio	Russian Federation	282	4	56	19	17	20
2021	Tokyo	ROC	335	3	71	20	28	23
Winter Olympics								
2014	Sochi	Russian Federation	232	1	29	11	9	9
2018	PyeongChang	OAR	168	7	17	2	6	9
2022	Beijing	ROC	211	2	32	6	12	14

In 2016 and 2018, the act of denying participation to hundreds of Russian athletes in those games does indicate sanctioning under Rule 6. The effect of the reduction of athletes in 2016 and 2018 may be seen in Table 2, which shows the medal count for Russian athletes at the last three summer and last three winter Games. The data is taken directly from the IOC website, where the IOC refers to Russia as the Russian Federation in 2012, 2014 and 2016. When athlete entries dropped in 2016 versus 2012 and in 2018 versus 2014, total medal count and ranking position based on total medal count became worse. As total athlete entries increased in 2021 versus 2016 and in 2022 versus 2018, total medal count and ranking position improved and returned to values close to those in 2012 and 2014,

respectively. Indeed, strongly reducing the number of Russian athletes had an obvious negative effect on medal count and ranking position as viewed by the public, looking at the medal table, therefore those actions of 2016 and 2018 were significant sanctions. The denied entries were for athletes that committed doping violations.

Since athletes compete for their NOCs according to Rule 6 of the Olympic Charter, it follows that the IOC considers the medal table to be those earned by the NOCs. Since the IOC used OAR to signify Russian athletes in their 2018 table and since those medals were tabulated versus all other NOCs, therefore the IOC considered the OAR to be the same as an NOC. That is, Russia was not forced to act as an independent or neutral nation, therefore competing as OAR was not a sanction in itself. On the other hand, since the IOC dealt directly with the OAR, the IOC could more easily contact and test Russian athletes than if the IOC had to work through the ROC.

Conclusions

When sanctions due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine have been completed, based on the discussion above, the following actions would provide the most meaningful sanctions to force Russia to comply with appropriate doping controls.

The IOC should begin by placing the ROC on suspension as was done in 2018. The Russians who wish to compete in the Olympics after being nominated by their sports' International Federations should do so under a banner such as Olympic Athletes (OA), but with no mention of Russia. Each athlete should undergo significant drug testing both while in competition and via random out-of-competition testing, which would be much easier to perform, not having to deal with the ROC. Further, to truly compete under a non-ROC banner as independent and neutral athletes, the IOC should not include any medals won by the OA in a medal table, since they would not be competing for an NOC. Since the IOC has exerted copyright control over event results in the past, the IOC can order news media to exclude OA medals from any medal table. Further, to act as independent and neutral athletes, the OA should not be allowed to compete in team events at the Winter Olympics such as curling, ice hockey and four-person bobsled and not to compete in team events at the Summer Olympics such as basketball, handball, rugby sevens, volleyball and water polo. Similarly, Russian competition in relay events and in events where individual performances are numerically combined into team scores should not be allowed. The above anti-doping sanctions should remain until the IOC decides that proper anti-doping controls are in place and are being properly utilized.

These actions would dramatically reduce the abuse of athletes like Kamila Valieva. A reduction in the systemic use of performance-enhancing drugs can also eliminate long-term physical ailments as was seen after the reunification of Germany, due to the many former East German athletes who had previously been involved in doping.

References

- International Olympic Committee – IOC (2017) *Olympic charter, July 17, 2017*. Retrieved from: <https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/General/EN-Olympic-Charter.pdf?tab=presentation>. [Accessed 15 May 2022]
- International Olympic Committee – IOC (2022) *Olympic results*. Retrieved from: <https://olympics.com/en/olympic-games/olympic-results>. [Accessed 15 May 2022]
- Raterriller B (2013, November 28) *Doping's darkest hour: the East Germans and the 1976 Montreal Games*. Swimming World.
- Stefani RT (2017) What performance data tells us about PEDs in Olympic athletics and swimming. In *Proceedings, Mathsport International, Mathsport 2017*, 340–346. Padua, Italy June 26-28, 2017.
- Stefani RT (2018, February 9) Anti-doping efforts, Russia's medals and Olympic athletics winners post-1988. Significance Magazine Online.
- Wikipedia (2022a) *Doping in Russia*. Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doping_in_Russia. [Accessed 15 May 2022]
- Wikipedia (2022b) *List of stripped Olympic medals*. Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_stripped_Olympic_medals. [Accessed 15 May 2022]

