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Article

Olympism, Olympic Values and Transgender Athletes: A Difficult Coexistence

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Abstract: The Olympic Games are considered as the ultimate event, the embodiment of excellence, respect and inclusiveness, but the issue of transgender people's participation in sports has become a subject that threatens the equilibrium between equity, tolerance, and honesty. This paper aims at exploring the philosophical aspects of Olympism and their incorporation, the process and the difficulties in implementing the Olympic values in the contemporary world. It reviews the history of the matter, ethical issues, and the current policies. The aim is to develop a conceptual framework that can help to understand the advantages and disadvantages of the Olympic Movement as an inclusive organization.

Keywords: The Olympic games; excellence; respect; inclusiveness; transgender athletes; equilibrium; equity; tolerance; cheating; Olympism; codification; difficulties; opportunities; inclusive management; Olympic movement

1. Introduction

Throughout the ages, the Olympic Games have been seen as a manifestation of universal desire, a link between different countries, and a festivity of human achievement. Nevertheless, in the present world, the issue of allowing transgender individuals to participate in competitions has become a subject of discussion on how to incorporate the Olympic values in the modern world. As Pierre de Coubertin himself noted: "Le sport est une fête de l'âme et du corps." But what does this statement mean in a context of socio-political and scientific complexity?

This article is going to discuss in a systematic and cross-disciplinary way the major issues raised by Olympic values, gender equality, and openness, with a special emphasis on transgender people. The purpose is to offer the policymakers, athletes, and the public a way to improve the debate and offer some potential directions for the future.

2. The Philosophical Basis of Olympism

Olympism is not just a sporting event; it is a system of philosophical ideals that aim at the perfection of the person and the promotion of peace and understanding among nations. Inspired by the classical Greek culture and revamped by Coubertin, Olympism centres on the person and nurtures the values of excellence, fairness and togetherness.

Nevertheless, when applied to the present debate concerning transgender individuals in sports, the conflict between the principles of equality and non-discrimination and those of fairness and justice becomes evident. The Olympic Charter, which provokes the principle of non-discrimination, is in conflict with the actuality of establishing equitable standards for participation. How can the rights of gender identity be balanced with competitive fairness? This question is at the heart of the current debate.

3. Transgender Athletes and the Evolution of Policies

The usage of policies that concern the participation of transgender athlete has changed a lot in the past two decades. The Stockholm Consensus in 2004 provided more specific protocols for transgender athletes, including surgical and hormonal protocols. But these criteria were considered as too narrow and not sufficient to capture the variety of gender identities.

The year 2015 was a significant turning point with the IOC publishing new recommendations which were primarily based on testosterone levels. Hence, transgender female athletes were permitted to compete only if they had their testosterone level checked and kept below 10 nmol/L for at least one year. This change was an attempt to ensure that people with disabilities are included while also ensuring that they do not have an unfair advantage, but it was also criticized by the scientific community. Harper et al. (2021) have shown that while testosterone suppression does decrease many of the physiological advantages, it does not eliminate all of the structural advantages such as bone density and muscle mass.

The most recent controversies underscore the importance of policies that are more flexible and based on the latest scientific research. For example, sports that entail the use of force, for instance, weightlifting is quite different from other sports that are technical or depend on endurance, which needs different solutions\$

Thus, there is need to develop sport policies that are sport specific as opposed to developing general policies.

4. Ethical and Scientific Considerations

The discussion of transgender athletes cannot be limited to legal aspects; ethical and scientific aspects of the issue are also important. From an ethical perspective, Aristotle's concept of 'equity' (ἐπιείκεια) helps: how can the rights of individuals be balanced against the interests of the community? The role of testosterone in athletic performance is still a subject of study scientifically. Hilton and Lundberg (2020) established that although hormone therapy is used, the strength and endurance of the transgender athletes is different from that of cisgender athletes.

These data show that the problem is not black and white and that the solution has to be evidence based. Another ethical concern is the privacy of athletes. Extensive testing and monitoring can greatly affect psychological well-being and violate the Olympic Charter's principle of respect for human dignity. These considerations make one to question whether the proposed policies are not only scientifically sound but also ethically justified.

5. Case Studies and Precedents

The examples of athletes like Laurel Hubbard, Caster Semenya and Veronica Ivy and the issues and controversies in participation of transgender or intersex athletes. For instance, Hubbard was the first transgender weightlifter to represent New Zealand at the Olympics and was among the most discussed athletes in the world. However, her participation was discussed on whether she was competitive or not while she adhered to all the IOC guidelines.

However, Caster Semenya's case has brought the public's attention to the issues regarding testosterone regulations for intersex athletes. Nonetheless, she is one of the best runners and has been subjected to regulations that many consider to be discriminatory. Last, Ivy Veronica is a cyclist who used her platform to create awareness of issues regarding gender identity in sports.

5.1. The Case of Imane Khelif

Imane Khelif, a boxer from Algeria, is a good example of the issues that are related to gender eligibility in sports. Her exclusion from the 2023 Women's World Championship created problems as to how the federations deal with the issues of gender and openness. Although the IOC has approved her participation in the 2024 Paris Olympics, Khelif's case shows that there are no clear and uniform rules at the international level.

5.2. Comparative Analyses

It will be helpful to make the comparison with the analysis of the gender equity policies in the history of women's sports. As pointed out by Senne (2016), women also experienced similar organizational and cultural barriers that prevented them from gaining full recognition and participation in international events. At first, they were excluded on the grounds of supposed biological differences or the alleged inviolability of the gender order, but these exclusionary practices were gradually challenged and dismantled through cultural and scientific change.

These developments suggest that while resistance to change may be strong in the initial stages, it can be overcome through the use of data, reason, and meaningful conversation. In the same way, it might be possible to work towards acceptance and integration of transgender athletes. Nevertheless, unlike women's sports, the transgender issue also chimes with other, more controversial debates, such as gender identity, biology and ethics, which make the way forward that much more difficult but no less necessary.

6. Reconciling Modernity with Olympism

To address these challenges, an integrated approach that entails multidisciplinary research, stakeholder engagement, and educational campaigns is required. It is only through the collective effort that true harmony can be realized between the principles of Olympism and the requirements of the contemporary society.

7. Conclusions

The inclusion of transgender athletes represents a crucial challenge for the Olympic Movement. However, it also offers a unique opportunity to reaffirm the fundamental values of Olympism in an increasingly complex global context. An approach based on scientific evidence, solid ethical principles, and constructive dialogue can ensure that sport continues to be a model of inclusion and fairness for the entire world.

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