



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

The IOC AC's recommendations on Rule 50

Q&A document

What is Rule 50 and why is it in place?

The aim of Rule 50 is that each and every athlete can enjoy the experience of the Olympic Games without any divisive disruption.

Rule 50 provides a framework to protect the neutrality of sport and the Olympic Games and strives to ensure that the focus at the Olympic Games remains on athletes' performances, sport, unity and universality.

Currently, in addition to the framework that applies during the Games with regard to commercial promotion, Rule 50 states that: "No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas".

Why did the IOC AC decide to start this consultation?

In June 2020, [following the publication by the IOC Executive Board of a resolution condemning discrimination in the strongest possible terms](#), the IOC Athletes' Commission (AC) was tasked with exploring additional ways of how Olympic athletes could express their support for the principles enshrined in the Olympic Charter, including during the Olympic Games, while respecting the Olympic spirit.

What were the already existing opportunities for athletes to express their views?

A wide range of opportunities for athletes to express their views at the Olympic Games existed already before the consultation. They include:

- in official press conferences,
- through social and traditional media, and
- at mixed zones in competition venues.

In non-Olympic venues, there are no restrictions, except for those resulting from local laws and regulations.

What are the recommendations proposed by the IOC AC?

1. Increase opportunities for athletes' expression during the Olympic Games

Recommendations

a. At the opening and closing ceremonies

- Highlight the importance of solidarity, unity and non-discrimination at the opening and closing ceremonies.
- Adapt the Olympic Oath to include messaging on inclusion and non-discrimination.

Below is the proposal for changes to the Olympic Oath (which was approved by the IOC EB):



“In the name of the athletes”, “In the name of all judges” or “In the name of all the coaches and officials”.

“We promise to take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules and in the spirit of fair play, inclusion and equality. Together we stand in solidarity and commit ourselves to sport without doping, without cheating, without any form of discrimination. We do this for the honour of our teams, in respect for the Fundamental Principles of Olympism, and to make the world a better place through sport.

b. In the Olympic Village branding

- Incorporate collective messaging into the Olympic Village “look” to celebrate Peace, Respect, Solidarity, Inclusion and Equality.

c. Through the Olympic Truce Mural

Context: The concept behind the design of the Olympic Truce Mural in the Olympic Village is “Frame of Peace”, recognising diversity, connecting people and bringing harmony. Athletes should be made more aware of this opportunity in the Olympic Village to express their support for these values.

Recommendation

Further leverage the Olympic Truce Mural in the Olympic Villages among the athletes for them to show their support for the Olympic Truce ideals and increase its reach through digital means of engagement.

d. Through athlete apparel

- Produce athlete apparel with inclusive messaging and make it available for athletes and their entourage during the Games.
- Proposed words are: Peace, Respect, Solidarity, Inclusion and Equality.

e. Social media campaign

Build on the “Stronger Together” campaign with the athlete community to increase awareness of our shared values of Peace, Respect, Solidarity, Inclusion and Equality.

f. Digital messaging in sports presentation

Incorporate messaging around our shared values as part of the digital messages in the competition venues and the sports presentation.

2. Increase athletes’ expression outside the Olympic Games

Context: As Olympic athletes, we are passionate about our sports. For each and every one of us, that passion continues into everyday life, where we advocate change on issues of great importance to us and our societies. Athletes should not be silent about the issues they care deeply about.

It should be noted that these causes vary for athletes from different parts of the world, backgrounds and cultures, and different issues are important to them.



The unique nature of the Games enables athletes from all over the world to come together in peace and harmony. By becoming Olympians, and through the platform that the Olympic Games provide, our visibility and reach within society is amplified beyond the 16 days of the Games. We believe that the example we set by competing with the world's best, while living in harmony in the Olympic Village, is a uniquely positive message to send to an increasingly divided world.

Recommendation

Provide athletes with a platform, including Athlete365, to discuss and highlight topics that are important to them. The expression of views should always be respectful and in line with the Olympic values.

3. Preserve the podium, field of play (FoP) and official ceremonies

Context: In the quantitative study, a clear majority of athletes said that it is not appropriate to demonstrate or express their views on the field of play (70% of respondents), at official ceremonies (70% of respondents) or on the podium (67% of respondents).

This position was also widely expressed in the IOC AC qualitative consultation. The argument the IOC AC heard was the need to ensure that athletes and their special moments are respected, and that the focus of the Olympic Games remains on the celebration of the athletes' performances, sport and the Olympic values. However, some athlete representatives took a different view, using freedom of expression and freedom of speech as their argument, and felt that this outweighed the other arguments.

The IOC AC took both views into account and consulted human rights and sports law experts. In these discussions it became clear that:

- I. While freedom of speech and expression is a universally recognised fundamental human right, it is not absolute. Such a right comes with duties and responsibilities.
- II. Freedom of speech and freedom of expression may be restricted under a very limited set of conditions, the assessment of which is delicate and varies depending on the circumstances (hence Recommendations 4, 5 and 6 below).

Listening to ACs as part of the qualitative consultation, the IOC AC is very concerned about the risk of politicisation of the athletes and the risk that athletes may be put under external pressure. It is important to protect athletes from the potential consequences of being placed in a position where they may be forced to take a public position on a particular domestic or international issue, regardless of their beliefs. In such cases, the political neutrality of the Olympic Games is a way to protect athletes from political interference or exploitation. (See the freedom of expression assessment section for details.)

In conclusion, the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that the majority of athletes want to protect the field of play, official ceremonies and podium.

Recommendation

- Preserve the podium, FoP and official ceremonies from any kind of protests and demonstrations, or any acts perceived as such.



4. Provide clarity on sanctions

Recommendation

- As it is the current practice according to the IOC disciplinary procedures and IOC Rule 50 Guidelines, examine breaches of the current paragraph 2 of Rule 50 on a case-by-case basis to ensure due process and the proportionality of sanctions.
- The IOC AC recommends that the Legal Affairs Commission clarify, in due course, the range of sanctions that would be imposed for a breach of the Rule, taking into consideration the respective context of each individual case.

5. Provide more information around Rule 50

Recommendation

Provide increased and enhanced information on:

- The purpose and scope of Rule 50.2 (athlete expression) and the related Guidelines.
- How the Olympic values and the non-discrimination principle are implemented and promoted by all stakeholders.

6. Restructure Rule 50 into two rules and increase clarity of Rule 50.2

Context: The combination of Rule 50.1 and Rule 50.2 in Rule 50 leads to a lack of clarity on the scope and purpose of Rule 50.

Recommendation

- Separate Rule 50.1 and Rule 50.2 into two rules.
- Provide more clarity on the scope of Rule 50.2, including by incorporating some elements that are currently included only in the Rule 50 Guidelines, into the Rule itself.

What is the timeline for implementation?

The conclusions presented today by the IOC AC will be taken into account from the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 onwards. The proposed change of Rule 50 of the Olympic Charter will be addressed taking the evaluation of the implementation at one edition of the Olympic Games (Tokyo 2020) and one edition of the Olympic Winter Games (Beijing 2022) into account.

Concerning the increased opportunities, will athletes be equipped with special apparel when they arrive in Tokyo?

In line with the recommendations proposed by the IOC AC, athlete apparel with inclusive messaging will be produced and made available for athletes and their entourage during the Games. The proposed words to be highlighted are: Peace, Respect, Solidarity, Inclusion and Equality. The IOC AC and IOC will turn its full attention to delivery for this for Tokyo. Details and logistics will be communicated in due course.



What kind of special apparel can the athletes wear? T-shirts, caps, pins?

See answer above.

How will the Opening and Closing Ceremonies be impacted?

After the support received by the IOC EB on 21 April, the IOC AC, together with the IOC, will work with the Tokyo 2020 Ceremonies team of Tokyo 2020 to ensure that the importance of solidarity, unity and non-discrimination is highlighted at the Opening and Closing Ceremonies.

What are the key findings of the consultation?

- In total, 3,547 Olympians and elite athletes completed the survey, representing 185 different National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and all 41 Olympic sports.
- The results revealed that the places most likely to be deemed appropriate by respondents for athletes to demonstrate or express their individual views were in the media (42% deemed it “appropriate”), in press conferences (38%) and in the mixed zones (36%)
- In contrast, the places least likely to be deemed appropriate for athletes to demonstrate or express their individual views were on the podium (16%), on the field of play (14%) and during the Opening Ceremony (14%).
- Moreover, a clear majority of athletes believe that it is not appropriate for athletes to demonstrate or express their views in these three places (67% think that “the Podium” is “not appropriate”, 70% for each of the “field of play” and “during the Opening Ceremony”).
- Among the new ways that were proposed in the quantitative survey, the athletes, as important to introduce, were to hold a moment of solidarity against discrimination during the Opening Ceremony (with 48% of respondents rating it as “important”) and to have unified messaging around inclusion and solidarity on the field of play (with 46% of respondents rating it as “important”).
- Additionally, the research revealed a clear result whereby unified messaging promoting the Olympic values and Olympic Truce (47%) was preferred over individual messaging about a specific cause (8%).
- 21 different ACs contributed to the qualitative research by providing in-depth feedback which reflected the views of athletes in their country or sport. The majority of ACs, regardless of whether they were supportive or not of additional ways for athletes to express their views, were against any forms of expression or demonstration taking place on the podium and field of play.
- On the topic of new ways for athletes to express their views, there was greater support for a unified moment of expression at the Opening Ceremony as well as for a designated space in the Olympic Village for athletes to express their views.
- Another key theme that emerged from the qualitative data was the need for greater clarity on Rule 50 itself, as well as further information on the Rule and its objective. Some ACs also referenced a need for greater clarity on the sanctions in place for breaches of Rule 50.

How was the consultation conducted?

The consultation process on athlete expression and Rule 50, conducted by the IOC AC, included qualitative and quantitative feedback from the global network of athlete representatives, the athlete community, comments from human rights and sports law experts, and an independent expert review of the methodology.



It started with calls with the ACs of NOCs and International Federations (IFs) that had asked to be involved to discuss key issues related to athlete protests and gather initial feedback.

All NOC and IF ACs were encouraged to consult and engage with athletes within their local and sporting contexts, and subsequently to discuss the results of these consultations with the IOC AC. This was intended to both empower athletes' commissions around the world in their roles and obtain a truly global perspective.

This led to the fact that consultations and surveys were conducted at a local level by a number of NOCs, and debates and webinars were also used as a means to discuss the topic further.

Qualitative feedback was collected from ACs through a variety of means, such as video conferences, domestic AC surveys, AC position statements and emails from ACs. In total, 21 different ACs contributed to the qualitative research by providing in-depth feedback which reflected the views of athletes in their country or sport.

A global survey was then launched to collect feedback from athletes from all over the world. The survey had a mix of quantitative and open-ended questions to ensure that all the nuances of the topic were captured. A professional research agency (Publicis Sport & Entertainment) was contracted by the IOC to implement the quantitative study.

The consultation was supported by the Continental Associations' Athletes' Commissions and the World Olympians Association.

In order to have an independent review of the whole process for the survey, including auditing the methodology, reviewing the questionnaire and its execution, as well as interpreting the data, the IOC AC engaged with the Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences (FORS), an organisation with extensive experience in high-quality academic surveys.

How many athletes were involved?

The recommendations are the result of an extensive qualitative and quantitative consultation process, which involved over 3,500 athletes, representing 185 NOCs and all 41 Olympic sports, and ensuring fully gender-equal representation.

What are the most represented NOCs and sports?

NOCs:

The largest contributors (all of which comprised more than 100 respondents each) were:

- China 14%
- USA 7%
- Japan 6%
- France 5%
- Germany 4%; Canada 4%; Great Britain 4%
- Australia 3%

Sports:

- Aquatics 12%; Athletics 12%
- Skiing/Snowboarding 8%
- Rowing 5%
- Skating 4%; Shooting 4%; Cycling 4%; Gymnastics 4%



Why did so many Chinese athletes answer the survey, influencing the results?

A global survey was then launched to collect feedback from athletes from all over the world. The survey had a mix of quantitative and open-ended questions to ensure that all the nuances of the topic were captured.

It is important to stress that teams from 206 NOCs and the IOC Refugee Olympic Team participate in the Olympic Games, and the objective of the consultation was to obtain a very broad view from the participants at the Games, which we achieved by having athletes from 185 NOCs and all 41 Olympic sports responding. China, representing 1.4 billion people, regularly sends one of the largest teams to each edition of the Games.

The recommendations from the IOC AC are in line with the overall survey results of the NOCs with the highest number of responses in the quantitative survey. The feedback from the qualitative consultation showed similar trends overall.

Will the recommendations be implemented in Tokyo?

The conclusions presented today by the IOC AC will be taken into account from the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 onwards. The proposed change of Rule 50 of the Olympic Charter will be addressed taking the evaluation of the implementation at one edition of the Olympic Games (Tokyo 2020) and one edition of the Olympic Winter Games (Beijing 2022) into account.

What's the difference between this consultation and the one developed in 2019?

In 2019, the IOC AC consulted with the global athlete community while drafting [Rule 50 Guidelines](#). The guidelines are meant to provide athletes with clarity on existing opportunities to express their views at the Olympic Games and where such expression is not appropriate.

The goal of this new consultation, which resulted in the recommendations supported by the IOC EB on 21 April 2021, was to hear athletes' thoughts on existing and potentially new opportunities to express their views at the Games, on how the IOC can amplify the voices of athletes everywhere, and ultimately better support efforts to tackle racism and all kinds of discrimination.

Is Rule 50 against freedom of expression?

Rule 50 is not against freedom of expression. It provides a framework to protect the neutrality of sport and the Olympic Games and strives to ensure that the focus at the Olympic Games remains on athletes' performances, sport, unity and universality.

The IOC and the IOC AC are fully supportive of freedom of expression. This principle is included in the [Athletes' Rights and Responsibilities Declaration](#).

The Athletes' Declaration also states that athletes should be able to "Practise sport and compete without being subject to discrimination on the basis of race, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, disability, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other immutable status."

During the consultation that resulted in the current recommendations, the IOC AC consulted with respected experts in the field of human rights to gain their perspectives on freedom of expression. The IOC AC engaged with Lenz & Staehelin (L&S) to seek feedback and advice from the human rights, sports law and non-profit governance perspectives.

In the context of the Olympic Games, the limitations stipulated in Rule 50 (2) are drawn from the following reasons:



- out of respect for fellow competitors and their sports performance (an athlete who has achieved glory on the field of play has the right to celebrate that performance without it being overshadowed by the activities and behaviour of others)
- to protect the political neutrality of the Olympic Games and ensure
 - o the focus of the Games remains on celebrating sport, Olympic values and athletes' performance; and
 - o no-one is put in a position of having to choose the legitimacy of a cause over another
- to protect athletes from external pressure to take a public position on a topic on which they may or may not wish to express their views publicly.

Rule 50 provides for limited restrictions to freedom of expression, both in terms of space (for athletes it only applies to very limited areas such as the field of play) and time (it only applies to specific moments such as official Olympic ceremonies).

The IOC does not seek to restrict freedom of expression outside of this limited space and limited time, bearing in mind that the Olympic Games only take place for 16 days once every four years. Outside of this limited geographical and temporal scope, including during the 16 days of the Olympic Games, athletes can express themselves, freely without any kind of interference from the IOC (e.g. on social media, at press conferences or interview with media).

The IOC is keen to protect the universality of the Olympic Games, in order to fulfil the Olympic Charter. The expression of political opinions at such key locations or moments of the Olympic Games may deter individual athletes or nations from taking part in the Games, hosting them, or even broadcasting them.

Rule 50 does not aim to silence athletes or make them apolitical. The IOC appreciates that athletes may wish to be vocal or political about issues they feel strongly about. Rule 50 aims to protect the political, religious and racial neutrality of a few strictly defined locations (field of play, Olympic Village) and of a few strictly defined moments (Olympic medal ceremonies, Opening, Closing and other official Ceremonies) which form the core of the Olympic Games. In other words, the purpose of Rule 50 is not to make athletes politically neutral, nor does the IOC wish to do so, rather it is to keep the Olympic Games politically neutral.

The IOC is also wary of the risk of politicisation of athletes and of putting athletes at risk from external pressure. This is particularly important also to protect athletes from the potential consequences of being placed in a position where they are forced to take a public position on a particular domestic or international issue regardless of their beliefs. For such athletes, political neutrality can serve as a way to protect them from political interference or exploitation.

Although the restriction imposed by Rule 50 may appear too sweeping, especially if compared to some sports organisations which allow expression in support of social (as opposed to political) causes, there are significant difficulties that an organisation as diverse and universal as the IOC would face in distinguishing between admissible and inadmissible causes. For this reason, a blanket policy of neutrality is deemed an appropriate and proportionate solution, including from a human rights perspective, given the risk of politicising the IOC and alienating countries or athletes.



Why can't the IOC allow athletes to express their views on the podium and field of play?

The purpose of Rule 50 is not to make athletes politically neutral, rather it is to keep the Olympic Games politically neutral. The IOC is keen to protect the universality of the Olympic Games, in order to fulfil the Olympic Charter.

The expression of political opinions at key locations or moments of the Olympic Games may deter individual athletes or nations from taking part in the Games, hosting them, or even broadcasting them.

Likewise, the IOC seeks to foster unity through sport in the Olympic Village and on the field of play.

The consultation carried out by the IOC AC showed that most of the athletes did not find it appropriate to express individual views during the Olympic Games, especially during the Opening Ceremony, on the podium and on the field of play.

Will the athletes who protest on the field of play or on the podium be sanctioned?

Although Rule 50 (2) does not set forth specific consequences for a breach of the ban on demonstration or propaganda, these are covered by Rule 59 (2), which provides for an array of measures and sanctions in case of violation of the Olympic Charter in the context of the Olympic Games, including disqualification (with return of medals won). The Rule 50 Guidelines specify that in case of a Rule 50 breach, "*disciplinary action will be taken on a case-by-case basis as necessary*". The Guidelines, therefore, provide sufficient leeway to impose proportional sanctions for breaches of Rule 50 (2) at the Olympic Games, taking into account the context of each specific case.

The IOC AC recommendations state to provide clarity on sanctions:

- As it is the current practice according to the IOC disciplinary procedures and IOC Rule 50 Guidelines, examine breaches of the current paragraph 2 of Rule 50 on a case-by-case basis to ensure due process and the proportionality of sanctions.
- The IOC AC recommends that the Legal Affairs Commission clarify, in due course, the range of sanctions that would be imposed for a breach of the Rule, taking into consideration the respective context of each individual case.

What kind of sanctions can the IOC impose on athletes infringing Rule 50?

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- As it is the current practice according to the IOC disciplinary procedures and IOC Rule 50 Guidelines, examine breaches of the current paragraph 2 of Rule 50 on a case-by-case basis to ensure due process and the proportionality of sanctions.



- The IOC AC recommends that the Legal Affairs Commission clarify, in due course, the range of sanctions that would be imposed for a breach of the Rule, taking into consideration the respective context of each individual case.

Who will consider sanctions to take against athletes infringing Rule 50?

If an athlete or participant is in breach of Rule 50 and the Olympic Charter, each incident will be evaluated by their respective National Olympic Committee, International Federation and the IOC, and disciplinary action will be taken on a case-by-case basis as necessary.