

The Olympics have always been political

Efforts to keep politics out of sports will never be successful.

By ALI WALKER, *Politico*, July 18, 2024 <https://www.politico.eu/article/paris-summer-olympics-2024-politics-sports/>

This article is part of the [Future of the Olympics](#) special report.

If there's one thing the organizers of the Olympics want you to know, it's that politics has no place in their biennial sporting event. It's the principle the International Olympic Committee (IOC) cited in the run-up to the Summer Games in Paris kicking off next week, when it announced that athletes from Russia and Belarus could compete, despite their countries' participation in the invasion of Ukraine. It's also behind the IOC's decision to ignore calls to prevent Israel from joining the Games over the war in Gaza.

The truth, however, is that the Olympics are political, have always been political and will always be political. Just ask Adolf Hitler, Vladimir Putin and Asterix the Gaul.

On their surface, the Games are a celebration of athleticism. Underneath, they've been bubbling with politics as far back as the original Olympics in ancient Greece, when city-states would use the occasion for political maneuvering and alliance-building.

The modern Games (first held, by no coincidence, in Greece on the anniversary of the country's declaration of independence from the Ottoman Empire) may have been founded on the noblest of political principles — the promotion of international goodwill. But they were quickly run through with nationalism, propaganda, cheating and eventually even terrorism and murder.

This dark side of the Olympics was the subject of "Asterix at the Olympics Games," the iconic 1968 comic strip by French cartoonists René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo. In the book, tiny Asterix travels from his besieged Gaulish village to Greece to compete against muscle-bound Spartans and burly Romans.

The Romans, thoroughly thrashed and humiliated by the Greeks, are then tricked by Asterix into gulping down his village's magic potion (the performance-enhancing drug of its day) ahead of the final race of the Olympiad. As one Roman centurion sagely observes in the strip, "If we are to be promoted, Julius Caesar has to be pleased, and if Julius Caesar is to be pleased, you have to win the race and the palm of victory." Instead, the Romans are busted for cheating and Asterix is declared the winner by default.

While fiction, the Asterix cartoon was inspired by the real world, in which a succession of dictators and war criminals have used the Games to whip up populist emotions or targeted them to make a bloody point.

Most infamously, the Nazi leader Adolf Hitler tried to use the 1936 Olympics in Berlin to celebrate his theories of racial supremacy — only to see his dream shattered by the Black American speedster Jesse Owens winning four gold medals.

The 1972 Games were the target of the Palestinian Black September terror group, which staged a violent hostage-taking in Munich's Olympic Village, killing 11 Israelis and a West German police officer. (...) Cold War-era boycotts then dominated the 1980 and 1984 Games in Moscow and Los Angeles, as the United States and the USSR kept their athletes at home.

More recently, Russian President Vladimir Putin and China's Xi Jinping have used the Olympics to legitimize and glorify their nations (and themselves). Beijing has hosted the Games twice this century, using the 2008 Olympics to announce its arrival as a world power to the beat of 2,008 pounding drummers during an eye-popping opening ceremony. China's 2022 Winter Games were overshadowed by calls for a boycott over Beijing's treatment of its minority Uyghur population. (...)

So what will happen in Paris? The 2024 Olympics have already been overshadowed by political upheaval in France after President Emmanuel Macron called a snap election last month. Other political issues that might muscle their way into the Games include the war in Ukraine, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and allegations of Chinese cheating by the U.S.

Let the Games begin? They've already started. (630 words)

The 2024 Olympics showed what the world is becoming

The Paris Games were refreshingly competitive, reflecting growing global wealth and prosperity.

By the Editorial Board, *The Washington Post*, August 12, 2024

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- 10 In gymnastics, Algeria's Kaylia Nemour became the first competitor from Africa to win an Olympic medal, and both Colombia and Kazakhstan won their first podium spots in the sport. Not every first occurred on behalf of an athlete's home country: Boxer Cindy Ngamba won the first medal for the Refugee Olympic Team.

- 15 The increasing diversity of countries medaling mostly reflects the growing number of independent countries since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. Over time, this has created a less top-heavy medal table. For most of the Games' history, only a handful of countries dominated. As recently as the 1988 Seoul Games, the top three countries won more than 40 percent of the medals. In Paris, that share was only a quarter. China, a nonparticipant before 1984, has replaced the Soviet Union as a fixture in the top tier. Russia did not participate at all this year, having been appropriately banned (along with Belarus) for its aggression against Ukraine.

- 20 New nations on the podium are also a reminder that, for all the world's problems, the past quarter-century has brought a historic decline in poverty and the rise of a "global middle class." Improved economic opportunity allows more young, talented people a chance to pursue their athletic careers — even on the world's biggest sporting stage. (...) Another positive global trend — easier, less expensive movement across borders — has resulted in athletes from poorer countries making use of top training facilities in richer ones.

- 25 Economics isn't the only factor responsible for a nation's medal count. Research has shown that higher gender equality in a country correlates with more female athletes winning medals, even after controlling for gross domestic product and population. Hence another milestone this year: The Paris Games were the first in which an equal number of male and female athletes took part — a stunning rise from the 1980s, when only a quarter of Olympic athletes were female.

- 30 Ms. Alfred of St. Lucia said bringing home a gold medal "would definitely have a positive impact" on the children of her country. The hero's welcome waiting for returning athletes in countries formerly devoid of medals will inspire more young people to try sports. And such scenes motivate governments and sponsors to invest more in athletics. (...)

- 35 Not every athlete can go home with a medal, and some lost out by mere milliseconds. (...) But even those who didn't make the podium took advantage of their moment. Kimia Yousofi, an Afghan sprinter, finished last but held up a sign to highlight the plight of women in her country under Taliban rule.

To be sure, Paris, like previous Games, was not without controversy. (...) Yet despite its problems, the Paris Games showed that more young people are getting a chance to thrive. Here's hoping Los Angeles 2028 is even more diverse — and exciting. 659 words

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I/ Many “firsts” in those games showing they are becoming more diverse

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II/ The Trends behind explaining this change

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III/ The aftermath – The long term impacts (see also I 7 and I 9)

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For more than two weeks, the **Paris 2024 Olympics** delivered an unparalleled sporting spectacle, captivating audiences worldwide.

Athletes from around the globe competed in different sports, showcasing their raw emotions, energy, passion and determination

While the athletes' physical feats captivated viewers worldwide as they pursued Olympic glory, some also left a lasting impression with their words, adding to the magic and spirit of the Games.

As Paris 2024 fades into the past, let's revisit some of the most memorable quotes from the 33rd Summer Games.