

SPORT AND HUMAN RIGHTS

April-June 2023

Content

Introduction	1
What's wrong with human rights in sport in Belarus?	3
Women rights in sport	8
LGBTQI+	13
Racism and antisemitism	16
War and sport	19
Safety, security and service during sport events	22
Conclusion	24

List of Abbre

ABFF — Association “Belarusian Football Federation”
IOC — International Olympic Committee
NOC — National Olympic Committee
FIFA — Fédération Internationale de Football Association
FIFPro — Fédération Internationale des Associations de Footballeurs Professionnels
NBA — National Basketball Association
NCAA — National Collegiate Athletic Association
NHL — National Hockey League
NWSL — National Women's Soccer League
UEFA — Union of European Football Associations
WNBA — Women’s National Basketball Association

Introduction

Today, the world of professional sport is changing rapidly. This is influenced by ongoing socio-political events, changes in the approach to governance by international sports organisations, and a strong demand for changes in the working conditions from professional athletes.

In this analysis for April-June 2023, we have examined the most significant events and news in sport through the lens of international human rights standards.

The issue of human rights violations has long been a part of Belarusian sport — ranging from restrictions on freedom of speech to poor working conditions and fixed games. However, in 2023, the international sports community has focused on another problem — the admission or non-admission of Belarusian and Russian athletes to international competitions, including the 2024 Summer Olympic Games in Paris.

In the lead-up to the FIFA Women's World Cup, the sports community actively discussed the issues of injuries, and questions of unequal pay were raised not only in the football community but also in tennis and basketball. At the same time, we have shared some examples of collaborations aimed at overcoming gender inequality.

June is annually recognised as Pride Month, so many sports stakeholders organise special campaigns involving professional athletes. In our analysis, we briefly shared the experiences of individuals working in professional sports who have come out, and how this affects the modern sports world and their place in it.

Finally, we have paid attention to the issue of racism in football, which has had a significant impact on the reputation of Spain's La Liga and the Spanish Football Federation. "The Vinicius Case" is one of the most prominent scandals of 2023, discussed at the highest levels of governments and international organisations.

We also touched upon the topic of protecting professional athletes in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine and the safety of athletes and fans during sports events.

**What's wrong with human rights
in sport in Belarus?**

On June 2, on the website of the Belarusian football club Torpedo-BelAZ, news appeared that their players would wear a new kit from the German manufacturer Puma in their upcoming match. The club referred to Puma as their technical partner on their social media (most likely the post has been edited, — author's note). Despite Puma's denial of cooperation with Belarusian football clubs, the brand began supplying equipment to Belarusian athlete Nedasekau in 2021, who openly supported the repressive regime in Belarus.

Puma, like many sportswear brands, claims that its strategy for sustainable development and engagement with society in the countries where Puma operates is based on respecting human rights. The same behaviour is formally expected from all its partners. However, even indirect support from Puma to athletes openly expressing their support for the Lukashenka's regime and repression against peaceful citizens not only contradicts its commitments to human rights but also creates a false image of normalcy for an authoritarian regime and its allies, undermining the ethical and moral values of sport.

Meanwhile, repression in Belarus continues. On June 28, in Grodno, Dzmitry Kovalyonak, a former player and current sporting director of FC Neman, was detained. According to law enforcement officials, Dzmitry was arrested due to complaints from club players that he was promoting "absurd extremist ideas." Dzmitry was released, but he was forced to record a so-called "repentance video" in which his personal correspondence was unleashed. The practice of creating and disseminating "repentance videos" is unacceptable and constitutes unlawful action, violating the right to be free from degrading treatment, freedom of expression, and the right to non-interference in private life.

On April 10, Belarusian lawyer Aliaksandr Danilevich was sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment for "assisting in public calls for actions aimed at causing harm to the national security of the Republic of Belarus." Danilevich's clients were Belarusian athletes Aleksandra Herasimenia and Aliaksandr Apeikin, who had previously been sentenced in absentia in Belarus to 12 years in prison. Danilevich was accused of intentionally assisting athletes by providing legal advice on international sport law. Such an accusation effectively criminalises all legal activities of lawyers in Belarus and deprives people of their right to defence, and lawyers themselves of their right to practise their profession.

Since the full-scale invasion of Russia into Ukraine, the question of allowing Russian and Belarusian athletes to various international competitions has been a pressing issue. There is no unified position on this matter, and each sports association or union decides on it locally. For example, on April 5, it was announced that the UEFA Executive Committee would not exclude Belarusian football teams from international competitions, despite the letter from 100 European parliamentarians highlighting Belarus's involvement in Russia's aggression and internal repression against its own citizens.

The lack of a reaction from UEFA and consequences for Belarusian football essentially serve as an example of sportwashing and can be used by the authorities as evidence of their legitimacy and recognition by the international community.

At the same time, the International Ice Hockey Federation has reassessed the possibility of allowing Belarusian and Russian national teams to participate in competitions and confirmed that such an action is not currently safe. The fate of Belarusian athletes at the 2024 Olympics in Paris remains unknown, whether they will be allowed to compete as a national team or under a neutral flag. On March 23, an interview with Belarusian cyclist Yauheni Karaliok, who supported the Belarusian authorities and the repression in the country, appeared regarding his possible participation under a neutral status. According to the athlete, all athletes should compete on equal terms, that is, as part of a national team representing their country on the international stage. Leaders of the G7 countries also call for not allowing athletes from Belarus and Russia to compete under their national flags, thereby emphasising the impact of Russian aggression on international sport.

In addition to outright bans by international sports associations, Belarusian athletes may also be subject to personal sanctions in different countries. As of May 29, Poland imposed sanctions against a number of Belarusian citizens, including at least 24 Belarusian athletes who are linked to the Lukashenka's regime, engage in propaganda, or assist in repression in Belarus. This means that athletes will not be able to enter Polish territory and participate in competitions there. If other countries adopt a similar position, it will effectively paralyse Belarusian professional sport, particularly for those athletes who have supported the Lukashenka's regime.

Patricia Lamanna, a Canadian football player who played for FC Minsk for three months and was dubbed a "transfer bomb," has shared on her social media that she is leaving the club. The player had initially planned to stay with the club for a year but decided to leave much earlier. The conditions in Belarusian sports may have influenced her decision: initially, the athlete had lived on the club's premises, but later she was asked to rent an apartment at her own expense, even though her bank cards did not work in Belarus due to sanctions, and her salary of 900 Belarusian rubles (~290 euros) was not paid in full. The player also shared that before the match against FC Bobruichanka, in which she scored four goals, she was not given food for an entire day, and she "almost lost consciousness." Patricia's experience shows that Belarusian football is not prepared for such transfers, and the working conditions for players are far from international standards in terms of fair and favourable labour conditions.

On May 11, 2023, the ABFF's website reported that the ABFF Committee on Control, Discipline, and Ethics had decided to apply disciplinary measures

against FC Shakhtyor, FC Energetik-BGU Minsk, and FC Belshina for arranging fixed games: fines, point deductions for the 2023 and 2024 seasons, the revocation of awards received in the 2022 Belarusian Football Championship among the highest league teams; personal disciplinary penalties for a number of players and representatives of the clubs' administrative/coaching staff.

In the ATN news pieces in June and August 2023, it is repeatedly mentioned that the peculiarity of these fixed games is the involvement of third parties in their arrangement.. However, as of January 22, 2023, Vladimir Niederhaus, referred to in the ATN news pieces as a “third party not affiliated with the club,” was the deputy director of the club responsible for sport matters. In one of the news items, the deputy head of the Belarusian Office of Criminal Investigations discussed instances of incentivizing FC Dinamo-Brest players, which served as the basis for disciplinary action against player Mikhail Gordeychuk by the ABFF. In this context, it appears inconsistent that the ABFF has not reacted to the statements of a Vitebsk player who claimed that the players received remuneration from a FC Shakhtyor representative but decided not to take the money and instead directed it to charity. None of the players/representatives of FC Vitebsk had been subject to disciplinary proceedings up to that point. Especially for institutions as influential on public opinion as state television.

The consequences of the legal crisis in the country cannot bypass the sphere of football: the absence of an independent football players' union in Belarus; a selective approach to choosing individuals subjected to disciplinary measures, both by the local football federation and the courts; the use of sanctions only against third parties and the lack of a critical approach towards itself by the ABFF. These circumstances not only undermine trust in the system of arranging and conducting sports competitions in Belarus but also jeopardise the guarantees of protecting the rights and freedoms of industry participants.

At the same time, Belarusian football is entirely dependent on state funding and support. Such dependence has a negative impact on the autonomy and management of the sports sector. An example of this is the appointment of former prosecutor's office employee Siarhei Kapytov as the chairman of the football club Dnepr-Mogilev. Kopytov himself, in his interview with the club's press service, shared that he “did not intend to come here,” although he had been repeatedly invited “10 years ago and 5 years ago,” and he described his connection with football as follows: “Even though I played basketball, I attended all football matches.” State influence on decision-making related to the appointment of football officials and managers raises concerns about the transparency and fairness of the Belarusian football system.

In the programme “News 24” on CTV, it was reported about a warm-up football match between parliamentarians and a “team with limited abilities.” This could have been news about an example of inclusivity in Belarusian sports, but in fact, we see the use of incorrect and discriminatory language.

The term “invalid” is inappropriate because it completely lacks a “people-first language” approach – a language that prioritises people first and foremost. The phrase “a person with limited abilities” is also incorrect and discriminatory because it creates a certain stereotype around a person (on par with “impaired”) to which the person may not relate at all. Disability is not only a medical but also a social concept, and a person's characteristics do not define his or her personality. Therefore, we recommend using the phrase “a person with a disability.”

Recent events in the world of Belarusian sports show that the authoritarian government of Belarus chooses to use its influence and control over the sports sphere, manipulate sports and sporting events, disregard human rights, instead of supporting the principles of fair competition, respect for human rights and freedoms, sportsmanship, and fair play. The analysed violations underscore the need to hold the government of Belarus and all individuals involved accountable in accordance with international standards in this area. The situation in Belarus serves as a reminder of the importance of upholding human rights principles in all aspects of society, including sports, and the need for collective efforts to ensure respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Women rights in sport

In the world of women's sports, there is a concerning trend regarding the right to health. One such example is the high mortality rate among women during pregnancy and childbirth, with dark-skinned women in the United States dying more frequently than light-skinned women. American track and field athlete and Olympic champion Tori Bowie died due to childbirth complications. A survey by a California university shows that medical professionals often do not listen to the preferences of women, especially dark-skinned women, during childbirth. Ignoring the opinions of pregnant women increases the risk of death and complications for both mothers and their children. Bowie's teammates spoke out after her death, highlighting the issue related to stereotypes about dark-skinned women in society, especially in the medical field. This further exacerbates existing inequalities and violates fundamental human rights, including the right to health and the right to life.

Female footballers are frequently faced with one of the most severe injuries for athletes — anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injuries. The captain of the England national team and a player for FC Arsenal, Leah Williamson, is missing the Women's World Cup due to an ACL injury. Williamson shared an emotional post on her Instagram. She is the third footballer to suffer an ACL injury at FC Arsenal in the last six months. Beth Mead and Vivianne Miedema also faced the same problem. Over the past two years, five more female footballers suffered the same injury and will not be able to participate in the tournament. Millie Bright managed to recover in time for the World Cup and will take Leah Williamson's place as the captain of the England national team. However, she also experienced the same problem earlier.

According to statistics, female athletes experience ACL tears 2-8 times more often than their male counterparts. According to one study, 1 in 19 female footballers tears their ACL. Among the factors that contribute to the increased risk are physiological differences between men and women, environmental conditions, hormonal fluctuations during the menstrual cycle, genetics, and biomechanics. Research on this topic has existed for about 20 years, but the problem remains relevant. While research can reveal the essence of the problem and statistics, it does not provide a solution. To some extent, there is normalisation of this injury among women, which is absolutely unacceptable and jeopardises the health, emotional well-being, and careers of female athletes. An ACL injury is challenging in terms of recovery — athletes rarely manage to return to the same level of play they had before the injury.

FIFA has developed an injury prevention programme called "The FIFA 11+" for both men and women, which includes dynamic warm-up exercises for athletes. However, many female athletes neglect this preventive programme due to a lack of time or access to resources at socio-economic and gender levels. FIFPro conducted a study in which 362 female footballers participating in continental championships took part. According to the results, 54% of them did not undergo pre-tournament examinations, 70% did not have

electrocardiograms (ECGs) before the tournament, and only 40% could call themselves professional footballers. The economic aspect of the problem also relates to the high cost of surgeries – as mentioned in the previously cited article from Orthopedics and Orthopaedic Surgery, the cost of surgeries in 2021 “may exceed \$650 million annually.” Additionally, attention should be given to the qualifications of medical personnel, the quality of equipment, and the ratio of support staff to players.

It is evident that research on women's sports injuries needs to be conducted not only at the biomechanical level but also in terms of quality infrastructure and investments in women's sports. This is a serious and complex issue that touches on questions related to the violation of the human right to health, the right to work (safe and equal working conditions), and protection against discrimination.

The European Club Association conducted a survey among 350 female players from 16 leading European clubs. 82% of the respondents experience constant discomfort when wearing football boots, and one-fifth of them customise their footwear using special insoles or by cutting holes in the heel to avoid blisters. The footwear market is built on a unisex approach but primarily caters to white men. While there is no direct research showing a correlation between improperly fitted footwear and the number of ACL injuries, according to Katrine Kryger, a lecturer at the University of St. Mary's in London, women's football games are often played on low-quality fields, and the use of footwear not designed for the game or not suitable physiologically increases the risk of injury.

In their turn, Nike introduced a model of boots specifically designed for women. The company spent over two years researching, testing, and designing such footwear, listening to the feedback of female players. Nike's experience should serve as an example for other sports brands in terms of a non-discriminatory and comprehensive approach to female athletes' requests and needs.

In a significant move, FIFA is selling the rights to host the men's and women's World Cups separately this year. However, FIFA President Gianni Infantino expressed his dissatisfaction with the unacceptable offers for media rights for the women's tournament in five major European countries and threatened to ban the tournament broadcast. Later, on his Instagram, Infantino added that viewing of the Women's World Cup is 50-60% of that of the men's, while the broadcasting offers for the women's tournament in the “big five” countries are 20-100 times lower, which he sees as a “slap in the face to all the great participants of the World Cup and to women worldwide.” It's worth noting that the prize fund for this year's Women's World Cup is \$150 million, three times higher than in 2019 and ten times higher than in 2015, but it still significantly lags behind the total prize money for the men's tournament, which is \$440

million.

In May 2023, the Italian Open tennis championship began, and within the first days of the championship, the issue of unequal pay between men and women came into sharp focus. The male champion receives \$1.2 million, whereas the female champion receives \$567,215. The total budget for all male participants amounts to \$8.3 million, while for female participants, it is \$3.88 million.

Both of these cases indicate a violation of the human right to fair and favourable conditions of work, particularly fair pay and equal remuneration for work of equal value; women should be guaranteed working conditions no less favourable than those enjoyed by men, with equal pay for equal work.

France's highest administrative court supported the French Football Federation's ban on wearing hijabs during football matches. The court issued this decision after footballers from "Les Hijabeuses" campaigned against the ban and filed a lawsuit against the federation. Such a ban contradicts FIFA's recommendations, as FIFA officially allowed the wearing of head coverings for religious reasons during football matches back in 2014 (Rule 4 of the IFAB Laws of the Game). In this case, there is a violation of the freedom from discrimination and an infringement on the freedom of Muslims to express their beliefs and convictions.

Recently, disputes have intensified between the WNBA and the NCAA regarding NIL (Name, Image, and Likeness) deals, which pertain to the use of college athletes' names, images, and likenesses in marketing and advertising activities, through which they can receive financial compensation. Thanks to NIL deals, college players can earn more than professional WNBA players, which has led some athletes to delay their transition to WNBA professional status. Breanna Stewart, a professional American basketball player, sees the cause of these disputes in broader issues. Women's sports receive less than 5% media coverage, and female athletes should not be fighting over that 5%. They should be demanding "50 or 100 or whatever percent," demanding more from the media and marketing companies in terms of visibility. The (in)visibility of women's sports in the media remains a relevant and pressing issue, closely intertwined with problems related to equal pay, equal access, and investment in women's sports.

During the analysed period, we also noted partnership initiatives aimed at promoting women's football. Spotify in collaboration with London City Lionesses and She Plays Football have teamed up, aimed at providing opportunities for a new generation of girls to play football. The project's goal is to "increase diversity in grassroots teams and provide unique opportunities for girls who aspire to play football." For 600 girls from across Barnet, one of London's 32 boroughs, the project offered free daily 1.5-hour football training sessions. These sessions were conducted by professional coaches, and

players from London City Lionesses acted as special guests to motivate the girls to engage in football. The campaign also collaborates with local schools and helps identify areas in society where girls lack opportunities to participate in sports. In response to an open letter from the “Lionesses” (signed by all 23 players), the UK government announced its intention to provide equal access to football for all schoolgirls. While equal access to sports remains a challenge, initiatives like these are essential for increasing inclusion and gender equality.

Another interesting example is Nike’s announcement of a three-year agreement with Liga BBVA MX Femenil (the highest women's football division in Mexico), and thus, the company became the league's exclusive sports partner. Nike had a similar partnership experience with the NWSL. The company will support women's football in Mexico both on and off the field by providing Mexican female footballers with innovative products, investing in development programmes for the new generation, and supplying leathers. Nike has long been working to develop women's football in Europe and North America. However, investments like the one in Liga BBVA MX Femenil allow Mexican women's football to compete with European football and create a global platform for it. Nike's example demonstrates how to support athletes while expanding opportunities for their participation in competitions.

Despite some positive trends in women's rights in sport in recent years, including the analysed period, issues such as unequal pay, low accessibility of sports for girls and women, insufficient investment, limited medical research, and consequently, a high level of injuries, still persist. The path to ensuring equal rights for women in sport is a complex and ongoing process that is part of a broader struggle for gender equality in society. All stakeholders involved need to continue their work to raise awareness, collaborate to overcome barriers, and ensure long-term change. By promoting the values of gender equality and supporting the potential of girls and women in sport, we contribute to creating an inclusive environment both on and off the field.

LGBTQI+

Despite the significant benefits that sports offer, such as improved physical and psychological health, increased confidence, reduced anxiety and stress, it remains inaccessible and often unsafe for LGBTQI+ individuals. Until all areas of sports become safe and inclusive for everyone without exception, there is a need for ongoing education, policy initiatives, legal regulations, and public actions aimed at achieving equality and safety in sports. June is Pride Month, dedicated to celebrating LGBTQI+ pride and the LGBTQI+ rights movement. It's a time when LGBTQI+ issues, including those in sport, receive maximum attention. It's also a time to discuss the achievements and successes of LGBTQI+ professional athletes and what has already been done to support LGBTQI+ individuals in sports.

One of the most successful coaches in the WNBA, a two-time WNBA Coach of the Year (2017, 2021), Curt Miller, is the only openly gay head coach at the highest level of basketball. Miller has been open about his orientation since the late 90s when he began his coaching career in college basketball. In a recent interview, Miller noted that for a long time, he didn't want to be known solely as the "gay coach." However, he now emphasises that he remains the only openly gay coach at a high level in both men's and women's basketball, and his visibility has become even more critical to support other gay coaches.

According to Miller, many gay coaches hide their identity and orientation because they fear it may hinder their progress in sports and their careers. "I want to be that role model for the next generations of gay male coaches that are right now wondering if they can continue to chase their dream. I want them to know that they certainly can."

Another openly gay figure in sports, Byron Perkins, historically black colleges and universities football player in the United States (HBCU), explained the reasons behind his decision to publicly come out. Perkins hopes that his openness and courage will inspire a new generation of LGBTQI+ athletes to embrace their true identities and confidently pursue their dreams in sports. Perkins mentioned that his relationships with his club teammates didn't change significantly after his announcement, and he felt constant support. However, Perkins doesn't rush other LGBTQI+ athletes to come out, emphasising that each person decides when the timing is right, and such a declaration should not jeopardise athletes' lives or livelihoods.

Jason Collins, the first openly gay athlete in a major professional league who came out in 2013, shared his experience in sports over the past 10 years. The NBA supported its player, and it was expected that this would inspire other athletes to speak openly about their sexual orientation. However, in the span of 10 years, only one player in a major professional league, Carl Nassib, made a similar announcement. Collins revealed that homosexuality was not openly discussed in locker rooms according to an unwritten rule, and the communication culture was toxically masculine. Most jokes and expressions

used to demean others in the sports world were either sexist or homophobic. Some players openly expressed their disapproval of gay colleagues. Collins' announcement garnered mixed reactions among athletes and fans, but he is glad to have become a symbol of progress in professional sports. Collins pointed out that women lead the LGBTQI+ movement in sports more openly, but it's essential for male athletes to take steps forward without fearing public condemnation.

Despite initially adhering to a strategy of portraying its female athletes as feminine and family-oriented, over time, the WNBA has become the most socially responsible and active professional league, openly supporting the LGBTQI+ movement in sports. The evolution of the WNBA's policy regarding its athletes and fans wasn't easy and began with athletes publicly disclosing their sexualities. While basketball player Sue Wicks doesn't consider herself a pioneer, her courage and the first coming out in the WNBA paved the way for other athletes today. The WNBA became the first professional league to launch an entire marketing campaign aimed at the LGBTQI+ community. The WNBA strives to support its athletes on a personal level as well, as seen in the story of non-binary athlete Layshia Clarendon, who became a prominent voice on the WNBA/WNBPA Social Justice Council. The council's top priorities include protecting LGBTQI+ rights and ensuring equality in healthcare and civic engagement.

It's worth noting that occasionally, the WNBA attempts to feminise its athletes, for instance, by offering more feminine and sexualized uniforms, thereby reinforcing old sexist stereotypes. However, today, more athletes find the strength to speak out and fight for their identities and equality.

Despite the growing acceptance and support for the LGBTQI+ community in major sports, violations of LGBTQI+ rights and the absence of safe spaces remain a systemic issue. Homophobia in sports is evident even at a symbolic level, such as some NHL teams or individual players refusing to wear rainbow jerseys in support of the LGBTQI+ community during warm-ups before special games. The NHL supports these refusals and insists that debates over such gestures of support distract from the essence of the game. Such a decision by the NHL rolls back efforts to make locker rooms, arenas, and sports venues safer, more diverse, and inclusive for all players and fans. It also highlights that sports leagues and associations still interpret values differently, and the potential for human rights in sports is greatly underestimated.

Racism and antisemitism

The problem of racism in sports, particularly in football, remains relevant. During a match between FC Valencia and FC Real Madrid on May 21, 2023, Real Madrid player Vinícius Júnior was subjected to racist insults from the stands. The player tried to draw the referee's attention to this, but it didn't result in any action. In one of the mix ups that followed, Vinícius struck a Valencia player in the face, receiving a red card and being sent off the field. After the game, Vinícius expressed his criticism of La Liga on his Instagram.

Initially, the president of La Liga, Javier Tebas, denied any wrongdoing. However, he later issued apologies. Simultaneously, six referees officiating the match were dismissed, offenders were detained, fines totaling 45,000 euros were imposed, FC Valencia's stands were closed for five games [FC Valencia partially won an appeal to reduce the fine to €27,000 and the stadium closure period was changed from 5 games to 3], La Liga conducted an anti-racism campaign, and Vinícius's red card was rescinded. The player also received support from FIFA, FIFPro, the President of Brazil, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and many footballers from around the world.

Additionally, the football federations of Brazil and Spain launched an anti-racism campaign called "Uma só pele" ("One skin"). As part of this campaign, the Brazilian team wore an entirely black kit for the first time in 109 years during a warm up match against Guinea. The Brazilian Football Confederation also promoted the "Com o racismo não tem jogo" ("No playing with racism") campaign, with its president advocating for more proactive actions by football authorities to combat racism in football.

Everyone should have the right to participate in sports without discrimination, in safe conditions, and with respect for human dignity. The behaviour of officials in sports shows that racism, hate speech, and discrimination still have a place in sports.

Tennis player Sloane Stephens, the world's 30th-ranked player, stated after her victory in the first round of the French Open that she has faced racism throughout her career, and the situation is worsening, especially online. She noted that she has blocked key prohibited words in her Instagram settings, but "that doesn't stop someone from just typing in an asterisk or typing it in a different way." For this reason, she doesn't believe in the effectiveness of the software available to players at the French Open, designed to block racist comments on social media, although she hasn't used it. Developers claim that the software operates on different principles and can genuinely protect athletes from insults and harassment on social media.

The Italian Football Association and members of the Italian government signed an agreement prohibiting players from wearing the number 88 [No. 88 is a numerical code for the expression "Heil Hitler".] in football matches as part of the fight against antisemitism in football.

In March of this year, a photo of a FC Lazio fan wearing a shirt with the number 88 and the name "Hitlerson" appeared on social media after the FC Lazio vs. the FC Roma match ended 1-0. Two other fans made the Roman salute. As a result, all three were banned from attending the FC Lazio matches for life. The agreement also allows football matches to be halted in cases of displaying symbols of hatred or antisemitic actions, and it includes the addition of an ethical code in accordance with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. The Italian Minister of Internal Affairs, Matteo Piantedosi, stated that these measures are "an adequate and efficient response to intolerable prejudice that too often arises in our stadiums."

Racism in sports is a long-standing and complex issue that affects athletes, fans, and the sports community as a whole. The problem manifests in various forms in different sports and regions and, unfortunately, continues to be the subject of numerous discussions. Combating racism in sports requires the involvement of as many stakeholders as possible, including athletes, sports organisations, fans, investors, and society as a whole. Recognizing the problem, taking necessary actions at both local and international levels, and fostering a culture of respect and inclusivity can help bring about positive changes, allowing everyone to enjoy sports regardless of their racial or ethnic background.





War and sport

During the analysed period of Russia's war against Ukraine, under various circumstances, at least 8 Ukrainian athletes lost their lives. These athletes include Oleksandr Dykyi, Mykola Yaremchuk, Oleksandr Khmil, Bohdan Khodakovsky, Mykola Zhidkov, Igor Osmak, Viacheslav Savytskyi, and Kyrylo Molokov.

In early May 2022, Ukraine launched the “Yanholy sportu” website, which provides information about athletes and coaches who lost their lives in the war. As of the time of this analysis, the website contains information about 254 individuals from the sports industry who have lost their lives since the full-scale invasion began. On International Day of Sport, April 6, 2023, an event called “Yanholy sportu: rik pamiaty” was held in Kyiv to honour the memory of the deceased athletes.

President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky supported the initiative of footballers Andriy Shevchenko and Oleksandr Zinchenko to organise a charity match at Stamford Bridge in London. The goal of the match is to raise funds for the reconstruction of the Kotsiubynsky Lyceum in the Chernihiv region.

In the section “What's Wrong with Human Rights in Belarus?”, we have provided examples of restrictions on the participation of Belarusian athletes in international competitions. Additionally, in May, the “Athletes for Peace and Freedom” conference took place in Tallinn, which became an “unprecedented international sports platform, providing a forum for professional sport representatives to convene and deliberate on how athletes and modern sports can leverage their potential to promote the ideals of peace and freedom.” The conference also discussed the place of Russian and Belarusian sports on the international stage. As part of the conference, a declaration was adopted, which, among other things, states that:

-  The IOC should take “comprehensive measures” to prevent the “use of sport for the propaganda of war and war crimes;”
-  Russian and Belarusian athletes should sign anti-war documents and should not use funding from their governments;
-  Russian and Belarusian athletes affiliated with the military cannot participate in competitions, and those who have been cleared to compete can do so in a neutral status;
-  The IOC should recognize the situation in Ukraine as a “war,” not a “conflict.”

The quote, “There is no such concept as 'refugees'”, was made by Vyacheslav Fetisov, a former Soviet and Russian ice hockey player who is now a deputy in the State Duma (Parliament) of Russia. In mid-June, there was information about the IOC’s decision regarding the criteria for allowing Russian athletes to participate in the 2024 Olympic Games. The basis for this decision is the formation of a team of refugees, which means that Russian athletes will be able to compete under a neutral status. Athletes themselves must submit their applications without the involvement of National Olympic Committees (NOCs). Once the applications are approved by the IOC, these athletes must renounce participation in national competitions and cease receiving support from Russian sports organisations. Special equipment will also be developed for neutral athletes. In response to this news, Fetisov added: “Who are they [the refugees]? Why do they have the right to participate today not based on sports principles but simply based on some definition? Here, in this sense, the rights of sports are being nullified.” However, it's important to note that the 2024 Olympics will be the third Olympics in which the Refugee Olympic Team will participate. This unique project demonstrates the IOC's commitment to supporting refugees in sports at both elite and grassroots levels. The project's goal is not only to help refugee athletes train to qualify for the Olympics but also to continue their sports careers and build their futures. These athletes also serve as a symbol of hope for refugees worldwide, showing that much can be achieved through sports.

Officials from Belarus and Russia consistently assert that they find any form of participation by their athletes in international competitions other than under their national flags and anthems unacceptable. Any efforts made by representatives of international sports organisations to find compromise solutions for athlete participation in sport events are criticised by the authorities in Belarus and Russia.

The IOC cannot provide conditions for ending military actions, but it does possess the necessary functionality to establish specific and transparent criteria for the participation of athletes from Belarus and Russia in competitions. Non-compliance with these criteria would exclude athletes from participating in the events. Active cooperation by the IOC with both international federations and civil society representatives will help the organisation provide an objective assessment of the actions/status of participants seeking to compete in the 2024 Olympics, a major global sporting event.

**Safety, security
and service during sport events**

Before the final of the UEFA Europa Conference League in Prague, a clash occurred between fans of FC West Ham and FC Fiorentina. People were throwing chairs at each other from a bar in Prague. At least three people were injured, and the police detained over 30 individuals.

On May 4, 2023, FC Napoli became the champions of Serie A for the first time since 1990 when Diego Maradona played for the club, and for the third time in its history, after drawing 1-1 with FC Udinese. However, the large-scale celebration was marred by tragic events. During the victory celebration, a 26-year-old man died due to gunshot wounds in the hospital. Three other people also suffered gunshot wounds. According to La Stampa, around 200 more people were hospitalised with various injuries, ranging from stab wounds to burns from fireworks. However, the prefect of Naples reported only seven hospitalised individuals.

The incidents described are examples of violations of human rights, including the right to life, health, freedom of assembly, and association. These incidents also fall under the scope of the Saint-Denis Convention. The Convention was adopted by the Council of Europe in 2016 and establishes a unified approach to safety, security, and service during football matches and other sporting events. These measures are interrelated and must be balanced.

The Convention addresses issues such as the safety of individuals before and after matches, not only inside stadiums but also outside them; risk assessment; cooperation between the police and other competent organisations; the quality of reception and treatment of fans; and the imposition of sanctions for violations. State authorities and sports event organisers must take into account the provisions of the Convention when conducting games and other sporting events to reduce the level of violence and enhance the safety of people.

Conclusion

Widespread human rights violations against athletes and other participants in the sports industry in Belarus, coupled with the absence of an adequate response to these violations, lead to a situation where the industry loses both professional talent (due to arrests, dismissals, forced emigration to other countries, lack of transfers for foreign athletes) and any prospects for development. Sports in Belarus is fully controlled by authoritarian authorities, leaving no room for diversity, unity, fairness, or respect for human rights.

The topic of women's health in professional sports has once again come into focus following the news of the death of Olympic champion Tori Bowie and injuries to Arsenal football players. Unfortunately, such events occur due to insufficient attention to women's health issues, gender discrimination in sports, a low level of medical research, and the neglect of women's physiological needs in sports.

The traditional June Pride Month becomes a time when athletes actively speak out about accepting and asserting their identity. However, the mixed reactions to athletes' statements and the arrangement of actions in support of LGBTQI+ community members remind us of the importance of informal education, the development of supportive policies, and ensuring equality and safety for all participants in the industry, regardless of their gender and sexual identity. The public outcry surrounding the Vinícius case has shown that joint actions by different actors (athletes, fans, sports event organisers, sponsors) aimed at addressing the issue of racism in sports can be effective.

The upcoming Olympic Games in Paris in 2024 will be the first major sporting event where clear criteria for selecting athletes for competition will need to be developed, taking into account not only sporting principles but also the political situation in the world. Additionally, recent clashes among fans during football matches in the Czech Republic and Italy highlight the need for strict adherence to the Saint-Denis Convention, which establishes a unified approach to the safety, security, and service during football matches and other sporting events.

FairPlay is a human rights in/through/for sports organization.

Our mission: empowering people in exercising sports and human rights for equal, inclusive, and fair Belarus and the World.

Our goal: human rights are respected in the sports industry.

To achieve our mission, we:

- **Analyze** policies, laws and practices and share about them in clear and accessible language;
- Engage in human rights **advocacy** at the national and international levels;
- **Educate** and raise awareness, including through sporting events.

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