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Olympic Values and Doping in Sport

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study examines the issue of Olympic values and doping in sport. The first aim of this pilot study was to explore athletes' and coaches' perceptions of the values associated with the Olympic Games and their attitudes towards doping. The second aim was to examine the relationship between the perceived Olympic values and attitudes towards doping in sport.

Methods: Fifty-three athletes (mean age 19.35, SD = 4.28; 45.3% male) and 52 coaches from Uzbekistan (mean age 32.00, SD = 9.91; 46.2% male) participated in this pilot study by filling out an online survey.

Results: The results showed that the value dimension 'achievement in competition' was most strongly associated with the Olympic Games. Participants held a more positive perception of the Olympics but were less positive towards the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The findings further revealed that the participants exhibited slightly positive attitudes towards doping in sport. However, it was found that the perceptions of values related to the Olympic Games were not related, as the attitudes towards the Olympic Games were a significant negative predictor of attitudes towards doping ($\beta = -0.17$, $p < 0.05$). In contrast, perceived corruption of the IOC emerged as a significant positive predictor ($\beta = 0.62$, $p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: The study revealed a positive attitude among athletes and coaches towards the Olympic values; however, the perception of these values was not related to attitudes towards doping in sport. More significant factors in predicting attitudes towards doping were participants' views of the Olympic Games themselves and their evaluation of the IOC as an organisation.

Keywords: values, Olympic Games, International Olympic Committee, doping in sport

1. INTRODUCTION

The Olympic movement aspires to *"build a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practiced in accordance with Olympism and its values"* (*Olympic Charter*, 2020, p. 15), culminating in the Olympic Games – *"a great sports festival"* that unites athletes from around the globe (p. 11). Yet, the Olympics are much more than a sports competition (Puijk, 2000); they represent a complex global phenomenon shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces (Kozatek et al., 2020; Roche, 2003). As a mega-event, the Olympics serve not only as a platform for elite athleticism and national pride but also for soft power and modern diplomacy (Grix & Kramareva, 2017).

Because of their global visibility, the Olympics attract significant scholarly attention, particularly regarding their social, environmental, and economic impacts. Public sentiment prior to the Games often leans optimistic (Deccio & Baloglu, 2002; Liu et al., 2017), though concerns may also emerge early

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on (Mihalik, 2000). Research consistently shows more favourable perceptions of social impacts compared to environmental outcomes (Ritchie et al., 2009), with cultural and societal benefits often seen as outweighing economic advantages (Mitchell & Stewart, 2015; Streicher et al., 2017). These perceptions are influenced by demographics, geographic location, involvement in decision-making, and personal values (Khaptsova & Fruchtmann, 2020; Lee et al., 2013; Vetitnev & Bobina, 2017).

Media coverage frequently highlights the positive legacies of sport and culture (Kim et al., 2015). However, much of the research still focuses on tangible impacts rather than on whether the Games truly embody the core ideals of Olympism – fair play, human dignity, inclusion, and peace (*Olympic Charter*, 2020). Since Olympism is inherently value-driven, it is crucial to explore how these values are perceived and whether they influence public attitudes towards the Games. This is especially important when contradictions arise between values such as excellence and respect for others (Rocha et al., 2023).

Emerging studies suggest that support for the Olympics is linked to how well the event is perceived to align with Olympic values (Koenigstorfer & Preuss, 2019). However, these perceptions differ across cultures (Puijk, 2000) and are shaped by factors such as nationalism (Iowerth et al., 2010). Such differences highlight the need for further investigation into how Olympic values are viewed globally, and how these perceptions support or challenge the evolving spirit of the Olympic movement.

It is worth noting that some studies have explored how athletes perceive Olympic values (Perez & Rubio, 2014) and their attitudes towards them (Veloso et al., 2020). However, most of these studies have been qualitative in nature. Quantitative research was enabled by the development of a scale by Koenigstorfer and Preuss (2018), designed to measure values associated with the Olympic Games. This scale assesses three dimensions: appreciation of diversity, friendly relations with others, and achievement in competition. It has been used in studies in Germany (Koenigstorfer & Preuss, 2018), later in Brazil (Koenigstorfer & Preuss, 2019), and in Lithuania to examine athletes' attitudes to Olympic values (Sukys et al., 2022). The most recent study using this scale was conducted in Turkey, where researchers compared the perceptions of Olympic values between athletes and non-athletes (Han & Kurt, 2024). While researcher interest in how athletes (and others) perceive Olympic values is growing, the number of such studies remains limited – highlighting the need for further research into how Olympic-related values are understood, and how the Games themselves are evaluated.

More recently, research has increasingly focused on values in sports. Scholars have not only examined athletes' personal values (Ring et al., 2020), but also how these values influence moral dilemmas and behaviour (Petróczi et al., 2024; Ring et al., 2020). Studies have also explored how sports values are linked to doping intentions (Hurst, 2022; Lucidi et al., 2017), anti-doping decisions (Veltmaat et al., 2023), and clean sport intentions (Mortimer et al., 2021). However, there is still a gap in the scientific literature when it comes to examining how perceived Olympic values relate to attitudes towards doping in sport. Therefore, the first aim of this pilot study was to explore athletes' and coaches' perceptions of the values associated with the Olympic Games and their attitudes towards doping. The second aim was to examine the relationship between the perceived Olympic values and attitudes towards doping in sport.

2. METHODS

Participants and procedures

Fifty-three athletes (mean age 19.35, SD = 4.28; 45.3% male) and 52 coaches from Uzbekistan (mean age 32.00, SD = 9.91; 46.2% male) participated in this pilot study by filling out an online survey. The participants were selected by using purposive sampling. The athletes had been practicing their sport for an average of 5.08 years (SD = 3.48). They participated in 13 different sports, including wrestling, gymnastics, boxing, and in other disciplines (e.g. football, handball, tennis). The coaches had experience in coaching for an average of 6.73 (SD = 5.30) years and their main sports were wrestling, gymnastics, boxing, and others (e.g. football, handball).

Before the data collection, an approval from the University's Ethical Committee was received. The data were collected via an online survey between February and April of 2025. The survey was implemented through the Google Form platform. All participants were introduced to the study aims and it was explained to them how anonymity and confidentiality would be ensured and that they could refuse to participate in the study or withdraw from it at any time by closing their browser. After providing informed consent digitally, the participants were directed to the questionnaire.

Instruments

Olympic values

The Olympic Values Scale (OVS) is a self-report 12-item instrument created to measure the perception of values in relation to Olympic Games (Koenigstorfer & Preuss, 2018). Participants rated the extent to which each of the 12 OVS items could be used to accurately describe the values in relation to the Olympic Games, measured on a 7-point scale from 1 = 'does not describe the Olympic Games at all' to 7 = 'describes the Olympic Games very well'. This scale consists of three factors that capture three dimensions: appreciation of diversity (including anti-discrimination, diversity, equality, and tolerance), friendly relations with others (including brotherhood, friendship, understanding, and warm relations with others), and achievement in competition (including achievement, achievement of one's personal best, competition, and effort). Previous studies showed good internal consistency of this scale ranging from .88 to .92 (Koenigstorfer & Preuss, 2018) or from 0.80 to 0.95 (Sukys et al., 2022).

Attitudes towards the Olympic Games

One question from Khaptsova and Fruchtmann (2020) was used in this study by asking 'In general, is your attitude towards the Olympic movement and the Olympic Games positive or negative?'. Respondents had to answer by choosing one of the four answer options from 1 = negative to 4 = positive.

Perceived corruption of the International Olympic Committee

Perceived corruption of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) was measured using four items: 'The IOC profits from the Olympic Games in unjustifiable ways'; 'The IOC will get rich at the expense of the host city'; 'Corruption is present in all international sports organisations, not only in FIFA'; and 'I see no difference between FIFA and the IOC in issues concerning corruption' (Koenigstorfer & Preuss, 2019). Evaluating each of the items, participants had to choose one of seven answers (1 = 'I do not agree at all' and 7 = 'I fully agree').

Attitudes towards doping

To measure athletes' and coaches' attitudes towards doping we used an 8-item version of the Performance Enhancement Attitude Scale (Nicholls et al., 2017). Although the original version consists of 17 items (Petroczi & Aidman, 2009), other studies (Nicholls et al., 2017; Sukys & Karanauskiene, 2020) showed better results using the 8-item scale within the sample of adult athletes. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with eight statements (e.g. 'Legalising performance enhancements would be beneficial for sports', 'Athletes should not feel guilty about breaking the rules and taking performance-enhancing drugs', 'Doping is necessary to be competitive') using a Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). The mean of the eight item ratings was computed and used as a measure of attitudes towards doping. Previous studies showed good internal consistency of this scale ($\alpha = 0.81$, Sukys & Karanauskiene, 2020).

Data analysis

We first reviewed the data distribution for normality. Next, descriptive statistics was calculated. Then, we conducted the Pearson's correlation analysis to measure relations between attitudes towards Olympic values and doping in sport. After that, we used the *t* test to investigate differences in the attitudes towards Olympic values and doping in sport among athletes and coaches. Finally, we used regression analysis to investigate associations between Olympic variables and attitudes towards doping. We used the SPSS version 29.0 software package for statistical analysis and set the statistical significance at $p < .05$.

3. RESULTS

The study results indicated that the athletes and coaches surveyed tended to view the values associated with the Olympic Games positively. Among the three value dimensions, achievement in competition was most strongly associated with the Olympic Games, based on the average ratings. Overall, participants held a more positive than negative perception of the Olympics. However, many respondents were also inclined to agree that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) is a corrupt organisation. Additionally, the findings revealed that participants exhibited slightly positive attitudes towards doping in sport (Table 1).

Table 1. **Descriptive statistics for study variables**

Study variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's α
Appreciation of diversity	5.29	1.66	–1.02	0.02	0.92
Friendly relations with others	5.40	1.63	–1.35	0.98	0.96
Achievement in competition	5.45	1.65	–1.32	0.83	0.95
Attitudes towards Olympic Games	2.93	1.14	–0.55	–1.18	
Perceived corruption of the IOC	4.59	1.79	–0.79	–0.52	0.92
Attitudes towards doping	3.65	1.66	–0.43	–1.38	0.98

Correlation analysis revealed that all three Olympic value dimensions were negatively associated with attitudes towards the Olympic Games and positively associated with perceived corruption of the IOC (see Table 2). In addition, attitudes towards the Olympic Games were negatively related to perceived corruption of the IOC. Perceived corruption of the IOC, in turn, was positively correlated with favourable attitudes towards doping. Conversely, attitudes towards the Olympic Games were negatively correlated with attitudes towards doping.

Table 2. **Pearson's correlation between study variables**

	1	2	3	4	5
Appreciation of diversity					
Friendly relations with others	0.88**				
Achievement in competition	0.81**	0.90**			
Attitudes towards Olympic Games	–0.25*	–0.24*	–0.21*		
Perceived corruption of the IOC	0.53**	0.50**	0.45**	–0.38**	
Attitudes towards doping	0.44**	0.41**	0.38**	–0.46**	0.75**

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

The study results showed no significant differences between athletes and coaches in their perceptions of Olympic values (Table 3). Similarly, no significant differences were found between the two groups in how they perceived corruption within the IOC. However, athletes demonstrated significantly more positive attitudes towards the Olympic Games compared to coaches ($p = 0.04$). In contrast, coaches showed significantly more positive attitudes towards doping in sport than athletes ($p = 0.03$).

Table 3. **Comparison of athletes and coaches**

Study variables	Athletes		Coaches		*t* (103)	p	Cohen's *d*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
Appreciation of diversity	5.14	1.73	5.45	1.58	–0.95	0.17	–0.18
Friendly relations with others	5.24	1.75	5.55	1.50	–0.98	0.16	–0.19
Achievement in competition	5.26	1.73	5.63	1.56	–1.17	0.12	–0.23
Attitudes towards Olympic Games	3.13	1.01	2.73	1.24	1.83	0.04	0.34
Perceived corruption of the IOC	4.43	1.94	4.75	1.62	–0.90	0.18	–0.18
Attitudes towards doping	3.34	1.73	3.96	1.52	–1.97	0.03	–0.39

Finally, we examined the association between attitudes towards Olympic values and attitudes towards doping. In the first regression model, the three Olympic value dimensions and attitudes towards the Olympic Games were included as predictor variables, with attitudes towards doping as a dependent variable. Gender was included as a control variable. The model was statistically significant (F = 10.35, p < .001), and the ΔR^2 indicated that the predictors explained 35% of the variance in attitudes towards doping. As shown in Table 4, gender and attitudes towards the Olympic Games were significant predictors, whereas Olympic-related values were not.

In the second model, perceived corruption of the IOC was added as an additional independent variable. This model was also significant (F = 22.38, p < .001), and the inclusion of the new variable explained an additional 24% of the variance in the dependent variable. As shown in Table 4, attitudes towards the Olympic Games remained a significant negative predictor of attitudes towards doping, while perceived corruption of the IOC emerged as a significant positive predictor.

Table 4. **Regression analysis of the associations between the Olympic Games-related values, Olympic Games, perceived corruption, and attitudes towards doping in sport**

	β	*t*	ΔR2	*F*
Model 1			0.35	10.35***
Gender	0.25	2.97**		
Appreciation of diversity	0.22	1.31		
Friendly relations with others	0.25	1.09		
Achievement in competition	–0.14	–0.74		
Attitudes towards Olympic Games	–0.29	–3.38***		
Model 2			0.59	22.38***
Gender	0.11	1.54		
Appreciation of diversity	0.02	016		
Friendly relations with others	0.09	0.48		
Achievement in competition	–0.06	–0.43		
Attitudes towards Olympic Games	–0.17	–2.44*		
Perceived corruption of the IOC	0.62	7.63***		

Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < 0.001.

4. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to expand research related to Olympic values. Therefore, the first aim was to explore athletes' and coaches' perceptions of values associated with the Olympic Games and their attitudes towards doping in sport. To achieve this goal, the study also examined the general perception of athletes and coaches towards the Olympic Games and the extent to which they trust the IOC.

The results showed that the athletes and coaches surveyed generally held a more positive view of the Olympic values. Interestingly, the overall perception of the Olympic Games was positive. When compared to other studies, similar trends can be observed. For instance, a study conducted in Lithuania (Sukys et al., 2022) found that university students most strongly associated achievement values with the Olympic Games, a pattern also observed in this study. However, a study conducted in Turkey with university students (Han & Kurt, 2024) revealed somewhat different trends. In that study, achievements in competition were the values least associated with the Olympic Games. These differences should be interpreted with caution, as our study involved athletes and coaches, while the mentioned study included both physically active and inactive students. Moreover, Han & Kurt's study (2024) found that students who are physically active and those who are inactive perceive Olympic values differently. In our study, we compared the perspectives of athletes and coaches on Olympic values and found no significant differences.

Previous research indicates that the general public holds a positive view of the Olympic Games (Koenigstorfer & Preuss, 2019). Our study showed that athletes tend to have a more positive perception of the Olympic Games than coaches. One possible explanation is that for many athletes surveyed, participation in the Olympic Games is still an aspiration, perhaps even a dream. This could explain their more favourable attitudes towards the event, which many athletes dream of attending. In contrast, coaches may have more experience, which might contribute to their more critical perspective. Notably, this is partially supported by the finding

that coaches view the IOC as a more corrupt organisation compared to athletes. It is worth noting that other studies have also revealed a lack of trust in the IOC among the public (Giesen & Hallmann, 2018).

The second objective of our study was to analyse the relationship between the perception of Olympic values and attitudes towards doping. However, before discussing these associations, it is important to highlight the results concerning the attitudes of athletes and coaches towards doping in sport. The data revealed that both athletes and especially coaches held more favourable than unfavourable attitudes towards doping in sport. This finding is particularly interesting when compared to other studies that used the same research methodology. Studies conducted in Poland (Sas-Nowosielski & Budzisz, 2018), Spain (Morente-Sánchez et al., 2014), Colombia (López-Hincapié et al., 2020), and Lithuania (Sukys et al., 2021) revealed that athletes typically hold more negative attitudes towards doping in sport. A notable finding in our study is that coaches have more favourable attitudes towards doping than athletes. It can be hypothesised that coaches may view doping as a means to achieve athletic success. However, more comprehensive studies are needed to test this hypothesis. It is more likely that coaches may not feel sufficiently responsible for doping practices. This assumption cannot be ruled out. A systematic review revealed that coaches often do not feel competent regarding doping-related issues, especially when it comes to their anti-doping responsibilities (Barnes et al., 2020). Although the role of coaches in imparting knowledge and fostering athletes' anti-doping behaviour is widely recognised as crucial, evidence suggests that they are not fully committed to the prevention of doping (Engelberg et al., 2019). Furthermore, empirical findings indicate that a proportion of coaches (15%) perceive the harms of doping to be overstated (Berbecaru et al., 2024). Additional studies have demonstrated that, compared to athletes, coaches are more sceptical regarding the reliability of anti-doping measures, often assuming that the likelihood of detection is relatively low (Moston et al., 2015). Consequently, it has been argued that "coaches could rather represent a doping risk" (García-Grimau et al., 2022, p. 8). Nevertheless, when constructing such a pessimistic narrative, it is essential to recognise that both coaches' and athletes' attitudes towards doping are shaped by a complex interplay of diverse factors.

One of the unique and novel aspects of this study is the analysis of the relationship between attitudes towards Olympic values and attitudes towards doping among athletes and coaches. The results showed no association between attitudes towards Olympic values and attitudes towards doping. However, a negative association was found between attitudes towards the Olympic Games and attitudes towards doping. Another interesting finding is that a more negative evaluation of the IOC as a sport organisation was positively associated with more favourable attitudes towards doping.

To summarise, the results suggest that athletes and coaches may not fully understand the values associated with the Olympic Games, or they may not sufficiently associate the Games with specific values, nor do they strongly identify with clear Olympic values. Although the Olympic Games themselves are positively evaluated by both athletes and coaches, this raises a dilemma: to realise the ideals of Olympism, it is essential that the Games be associated with values. However, this is not easy, especially since it is difficult to reconcile values such as respect for others and the pursuit of excellence and achievement. Thus, the role of organisations like the IOC is crucial in this regard. Nevertheless, our study, as well as other studies (Giesen & Hallmann, 2018), have shown that this organisation lacks public trust.

The study revealed interesting insights into the attitudes of athletes and coaches towards Olympic values, as well as their association to attitudes towards doping. However, the results should be interpreted with caution, as this was a pilot study. The small sample size may have influenced the lack of statistically significant findings for some hypothesised relationships. Furthermore, the data cannot be generalised to the entire population of athletes or coaches. Nonetheless, the revealed data on how Olympic values are perceived and how they relate to doping attitudes provide a strong basis for continuing research in this area.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study results indicated that both athletes and coaches generally viewed the values associated with the Olympic Games positively. Among the three value dimensions, *achievement in competition* was most strongly linked to the Olympic Games. Overall, participants held a more positive than negative perception of the Olympics, although many also agreed with the statement that the IOC is a corrupt organisation. The data revealed that both athletes – and especially coaches – held more favourable than unfavourable attitudes towards doping in sport.

No significant relationship was found between the perception of Olympic values and attitudes towards doping. However, a negative association emerged between attitudes towards the Olympic Games and attitudes towards doping. Additionally, a negative evaluation of the IOC as a sport organisation was positively associated with more favourable attitudes towards doping.

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