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February 2023

# 24TH WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES ATHLETE EXPERIENCE



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In February of 2022, IntelliSport Analytics commissioned a study of the 24th Winter Olympic Games (“The Games”), hosted in Beijing, China, to examine the experiences of athletes. In total, 2,895 athletes were invited to participate in the study, garnering 232 respondents (8%), of which 161 completed the entire survey (5%). The survey was followed by Zoom interviews to contextualize the data from the survey. The consultants interviewed seven athletes.

The purpose of this study was to understand how athletes experienced the 2022 Winter Olympic Games. IntelliSport Analytics used a mixed methodological approach, applying quantitative (survey), and qualitative (open-ended responses and interviews) methods. Using this approach, the study examined: (1) athletes' awareness of and perceptions of various Olympic Games attributes (competition formats, atmosphere, access to resources, training and competition environments, etc.); (2) the impact of COVID-19; (3) the awareness of and influence of the Olympic Principles; (4) political and social issues during the Olympic Games; and (5) the perception of performance enhancing drug use.

This study found that the experiences of men and women athletes were mostly the same, but there were significant differences between how younger (under 25 years old) and older athletes (25 years and older) experienced the games. The significant differences in experiences between age groups are grounded in their rating of the International Olympic Committee’s (IOC) Olympic Principles, ten concepts that guide the intent and actions for the Olympic movement. Younger athletes reported higher ratings of the Principles (selecting agree or strongly agree to sentiment ratings). However, both older and younger athletes rated half of the Principles below a mean top-box (agree or strongly agree) score of 50%. The low rating of the IOC’s Principles indicates a gap between the IOC’s implementation of the Principles and the athletes’ perception and experience of the Principles.

Covid-19 defined much of the experiences of the athletes at these Olympic Games. The pandemic disrupted travel, practice and competition, imposed obtrusive socialization restrictions, stringent testing, among other factors that forced restrictions upon the athletes. The impact of these disruptions were consequential – athletes were forced to miss competitions, were subjected to isolation when testing positive, and were unable to participate in important socialization with fellow athletes from around the world.

Several issues in sport also were defining features of these Olympic Games, namely politics and doping. The threat of war between Russia and Ukraine during the Games amplified the conflict over the Games’ political neutrality and the athletes’ right to self-expression. The wide differences in athlete responses reveal inadequacies of IOC policy, education, and leadership in guiding athletes on how to express their views when sport intersects with politics.

Doping at the Games became a flash point when a high profile athlete from the Russian Olympic Committee tested positive for a performance enhancing drug. This incident was the impetus for this study to examine athletes' sentiment and perception of doping at the Games. The findings showed doping remains problematic for Olympic competition, but most likely is concentrated in specific sports.

The experiences of the athletes at the 24th Winter Olympic Games are complex and often uniquely different from one athlete to another. Despite these differences, this study through its use of various research methods found consistent themes that reflect widespread gaps in athlete experience that indicates important work is needed to improve their experiences. IntelliSport Analytics recommends the IOC consider the following tactics to improve athletes' experiences when competing at an Olympic Games:

#### *Policy-*

- Focus on translating the often intangible and lofty ideals of the Olympic Principles into practical action that directly impacts the athletes. Key to achieving this will be partnering with athletes to examine why the IOC is falling short of delivering these goals and what steps need to be taken to build a better world through sport.
- The IOC needs to place a premium on supporting athlete wellbeing, specifically mental health. The isolation restrictions placed upon athletes who tested positive for Covid-19 revealed the inadequacies to support athletes' mental wellbeing.
- The IOC should work with key stakeholders to reexamine its stance on political statements (see [Rule 50](#)), and how it provides guidance to athletes. The conflict between neutrality and free speech will continue unless the IOC can provide better guidance on its stances as an organization and how athletes should use their own voices.

#### *Research-*

- The IOC should establish a comprehensive athlete experience assessment tool to benchmark athletes' experiences across Olympic Games. Measuring the athlete experience will provide the IOC clear metrics on how it can improve its support of athletes and establish continuity between games despite differences in NOC hosts.
- The data from this study supports doping may be problematic for specific sports. The IOC should collect additional data by sport to increase transparency and gauge athlete perception of drug use. Identifying the sports that are perceived to have higher rates of doping would help the IOC effectively concentrate how it deploys resources related to education, prevention, and testing.



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# INTRODUCTION

## CONTEXT

In February of 2022, IntelliSport Analytics, commissioned a study of the 24th Winter Olympic Games, (“The Games”), hosted in Beijing, China, to examine the experiences of athletes. In total, 2,895 athletes were invited to participate in the study, garnering 161 participants (5%) and 232 partial participants (8%). The survey was followed by Zoom interviews to contextualize the data from the survey. The consultants interviewed seven athletes.

The study focused specifically on several areas:

1. Athlete awareness of and perceptions of various Olympic Games attributes (competition formats, atmosphere, access to resources, training and competition environments, etc.)
2. The impact of COVID-19
3. The perception of performance enhancing drug use
4. The awareness of and influence of the Olympic Principles
5. The role of issues in sport on athlete experience

## **METHODOLOGY**

To better understand the beliefs and perceptions held by athletes at the 24th Winter Olympic Games, the study was designed in two parts: (1) a survey and (2) interviews. The survey was built by the researchers to examine the five key research areas. The survey was available for completion from April 1st to August 31st, 2022. Athletes were invited to participate in the study via direct messaging from IntelliSport Analytics on social media outlets (Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn). In total, 2,895 athletes were invited to participate in the study, garnering 161 participants (5%), and 232 partial participants (8%). The survey was followed by Zoom interviews to contextualize the data from the survey. The consultants interviewed (7) athletes from seven different countries.

## **INSTRUMENT**

The design of the survey instrument was based on scholarly research by Parent, M. M., MacIntosh, E., Culver, D., & Naraine, M. L. Brad Rawlins, *Benchmarking the Buenos Aires 2018 athletes' perspective for a longitudinal analysis of Youth Olympic Games athlete experience and learning*, (2019). This research provided a foundational framework on how to approach examining athlete experience in their sport and the atmosphere of the Games. Results of this study found that specific experiences (convergence of athletes from around the world, association with the best athletes, general atmosphere, venues, transportation and learning) contributed to athlete positive experiences.

In addition to using this research as a foundation for the study, IntelliSport Analytics built the research instruments (survey and interviews) to capture athlete sentiment on how the IOC's Olympic Principles impact their experiences, as well as important issues in sport (doping, politics, Covid-19) modified their time during the Olympic Games. This was done to ensure that the study examined important timely events that occurred specifically during the 24th Winter Olympic Games.

## **N**

The letter “N” refers to the number of people being referred to in the research. For example  $n=2,895$ , is the number of athletes invited to participate in the survey.

## **TOP BOX**

In this survey, Top Box refers to the percentage of participants who gave unqualified high ratings on a question. In most cases, the question was asked on a 7-point scale (“strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”). The Top Box is the percentage of participants who gave a rating of “agree” (6) and “strongly agree” (7). As a general guide, a Top Box score of above 50% is good and above 70% is outstanding.

## STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE

In this report, when we present two numbers from the survey as being different from one another we are referring to a statistical term called “significant,” which is determined from a statistical test such as an ANOVA or a t-test. This means we are 95% confident the number difference is not caused by chance and if we conducted the survey again, we would see the same difference.

Intellisport investigated how athletes in different demographic groups experienced the games. To supplement descriptive statistics from the survey, researchers aimed to conduct statistical tests based on three groupings: age, gender, and region of the NOC represented. However, the sample sizes for certain continents were too small to generate meaningful conclusions, so tests on regional differences were excluded.

The researchers selected questions that encompassed an experience dimension (how athletes rated the services and atmosphere at the Games) and a mission dimension (how athletes rated the expression of IOC principles). Then, for each Likert scale question, researchers regressed responses on a scale of 1 to 7 on a binary dummy variable for gender or for age. Athletes who did not answer all of the selected questions were removed from the analysis (ie., only the 161 full participants were considered).

Gender was coded 1 for female athletes and 0 for male while age was coded 1 for U25 athletes and 0 for athletes 25 and older. If the coefficient of a dummy variable was significant (p-value < .05) in regression results, then the mean of the group coded 1 was significantly different from the baseline group coded 0. Additionally, if a difference was significant, then the sign of the dummy variable’s regression coefficient indicates the direction of the difference.

For example, if the coefficient of the gender dummy is significant, then there is a significant difference between male and female athletes. If its slope is negative, then female athletes on average rated lower than their male counterparts.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

IntelliSport scraped athlete profile data from the [IOC website](#) for the 2022 Winter Olympic Games. This data included the athlete’s first name, last name, National Olympic Committee, participating sport, and social media handles. All athletes were contacted and given the opportunity to complete the survey. See Figure 1 for respondent information.

**FIGURE 1: RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>INVITED</b>	<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	2,895	232 (8%)
<b>COUNTRIES</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>
Andorra	0.85%	2
Argentina	0.43%	1
Armenia	0.85%	2
Australia	0.85%	2
Austria	4.27%	10
Azerbaijan	0.43%	1
Belarus	0.85%	2
Belgium	0.85%	2
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.43%	1
Brazil	0.43%	1
Bulgaria	0.85%	2
Canada	3.85%	9
Croatia	1.71%	4
Cyprus	0.00%	0
Czech Republic	6.03%	14



COUNTRIES	PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANTS	PARTICIPANTS
Denmark	2.56%	6
Eritrea	0.43%	1
Estonia	2.99%	7
Finland	2.99%	7
France	1.71%	4
Georgia	1.28%	3
Germany	2.14%	5
Ghana	0.43%	1
Great Britain	2.14%	5
Hungary	0.85%	2
Iceland	0.43%	1
Ireland	0.85%	2
Italy	6.84%	16
Jamaica	0.85%	2
Kazakhstan	4.27%	10
Kosovo	0.43%	1
Latvia	3.85%	9

COUNTRIES	PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANTS	PARTICIPANTS
Lebanon	0.43%	1
Lithuania	0.85%	2
Luxembourg	0.43%	1
Madagascar	0.43%	1
Mexico	0.43%	1
Montenegro	0.43%	1
Morocco	0.43%	1
Netherlands	0.43%	1
New Zealand	0.43%	1
Norway	2.14%	5
People's Republic of China	0.43%	1
Peru	0.43%	1
Philippines	0.85%	2
Poland	2.99%	7
Republic of Korea	0.43%	1
ROC	4.70%	11
Romania	0.85%	2
San Marino	0.43%	1

<b>COUNTRIES</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>
Saudi Arabia	0.43%	1
Slovakia	2.14%	5
Slovenia	1.71%	4
Spain	0.43%	1
Sweden	2.99%	7
Switzerland	8.97%	21
Thailand	0.00%	0
Trinidad and Tobago	0.43%	1
Turkey	0.43%	1
Ukraine	2.56%	6
United States of America	4.70%	11
<b>TOTAL COUNTRIES</b>	<b>61</b>	

<b>GENDER</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>
Men	50%	116
Women	50%	116
<b>AGE</b>		
Age (mean)	N/A	26
Age (median)	N/A	25
Age (mode)	N/A	24
Age (range)	N/A	15-43
<b>SPORT</b>		
Alpine Skiing	14%	33
Biathlon	8%	20
Bobsleigh	6%	16
Cross-Country Skiing	17%	40
Curling	4%	9
Figure Skating	6%	13
Freestyle Skiing	9%	22
Ice Hockey	9%	20
Luge	3%	8
Nordic Combined	3%	8

SPORT	PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANTS	PARTICIPANTS
Short Track Speed Skating	3%	6
Skeleton	2%	4
Ski Jumping	4%	9
Snowboard	6%	13
Speed Skating	5%	11
COVID-19 QUARANTINE		
	Quarantined	Not-Quarantined
Men	9	107
Women	8	108

# PART I – THE OLYMPIC GAMES ATHLETE EXPERIENCE

The primary function of this study was to answer the following research question: How did athletes perceive different aspects of the 2022 Winter Olympic Games? To answer this question, the study's instruments were designed to capture sentiment in several key areas:

1. Overall Experience
2. COVID-19
3. Training and Competition
4. The Media

These four themes revealed the following data in Figure 2:

**FIGURE 2: Athlete Perception of 24th Winter Olympic Games Aspects Linked to Games Experience**

Item	N	Mean
How would you rate the athlete accommodations (housing)	232	4.90
How would you rate the variety and quality of food available	232	3.41
How would you rate the friendliness of Olympic staff and volunteers	232	5.75
How would you rate wifi access	232	5.20
How would your rate translation services	232	4.18
It was easy to meet and share experiences with athletes from other Olympic countries	232	4.04
My country NOC supported my needs as an athlete	232	5.52
It was easy to travel to and from the competition venue	232	5.43

Item	N	Mean
Doping/drug testing control was effective	232	5.61
I was comfortable with doping/drug testing control procedures	232	5.69
I was satisfied with the medical treatment I received	232	5.70
I valued the experience of competing with mixed (men & women) teams and competition	232	6.02
The training equipment provided by the organizing Olympic Committee was of high quality	232	5.68
The competition equipment provided by the organizing Olympic Committee was of high quality	232	5.98
The competition atmosphere was positive for athletes	232	5.32
The media accurately reported the events in which I competed	191	5.71
The media was respectful of my time	191	5.91
My events at the Olympic Games were broadcasted in my home country	191	6.04

See Figure 3 for the top-box ratings for each experiential rating (Agree to Strongly Agree; or Excellent to Exceptional):

**FIGURE 3: Top Box Ratings of Aspects Linked to Games Experience**

Item	Top-Box
How would you rate the athlete accommodations (housing)	37%
How would you rate the variety and quality of food available	11%
How would you rate the friendliness of Olympic staff and volunteers	68%
How would you rate wifi access	45%
How would your rate translation services	17%
It was easy to meet and share experiences with athletes from other Olympic countries	22%
My country NOC supported my needs as an athlete	62%
It was easy to travel to and from the competition venue	66%
It was easy to travel to and from the training venue	67%
Doping/drug testing control was effective	53%
I was comfortable with doping/drug testing control procedures	51%
I was satisfied with the medical treatment I received	48%
I valued the experience of competing with mixed (men & women) teams and competition	54%



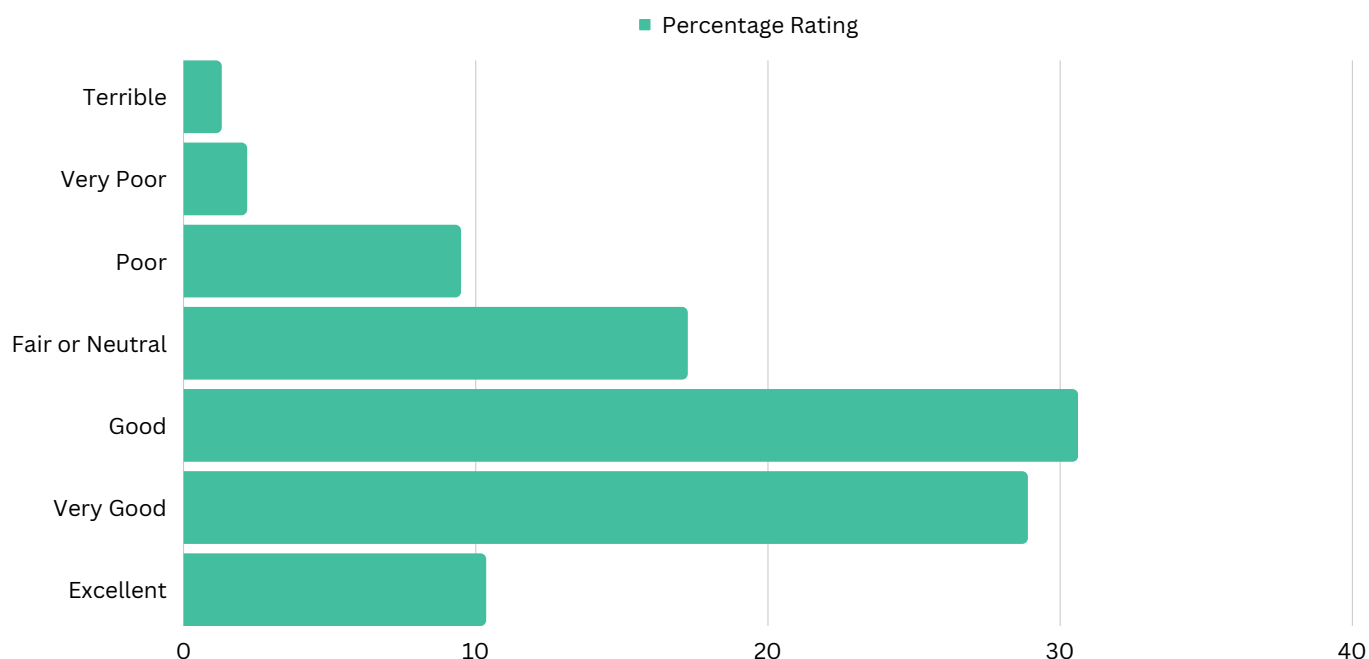
Item	Top-Box
The competition equipment provided by the organizing Olympic Committee was of high quality	67%
The competition atmosphere was positive for athletes	55%
The media accurately reported the events in which I competed	71%
The media was respectful of my time	77%
My events at the Olympic Games were broadcasted in my home country	80%

## OVERALL EXPERIENCE

The selection of these areas were based on the work done by scholars Parent, M. M., MacIntosh, E., Culver, D., & Naraine, M. L. Brad Rawlins, *Benchmarking the Buenos Aires 2018 athletes' perspective for a longitudinal analysis of Youth Olympic Games athlete experience and learning*. These researchers found that specific experiences (convergence of athletes from around the world, association with the best athletes, general atmosphere, venues, transportation and learning) contributed to positive athlete experiences. IntelliSport Analytics found it important to build on this work to identify consistencies and inconsistencies in their findings, as well as to focus on the impact of COVID-19 on these Olympic Games.

To understand the overall experience of the athletes at the Olympic Games, the study asked the athletes to rate their overall experience. The athletes' responses produced a top-box rating (Very Good or Excellent) of approximately 40%. This rating falls below a minimum top-box rating expectation of 50%. See Figure 4 below:

**FIGURE 4: Overall, how would you rate your experience at the 24th Winter Olympic Games?**



Athletes who rated their experiences on the scale of terrible, very poor, poor, or fair or neutral were asked to explain why they rated their experience in this way. The following themes emerged in Figure 5:

**FIGURE 5: Reasons for Negative Experience Ratings of Games**

CODE	CODE MEANING	CODE COUNT
Covid Restrictions	Covid restrictions, including testing, quarantine, and inability to move around normally hindered experience	33
Food	Food was described as poor, including a lack of variety and quality	17
Atmosphere	The Olympic Games atmosphere was muted, including the sense of community and shared experience with athletes from around the world	16
Socialization Restrictions	Athletes look forward to socializing with other athletes. Covid prevented the athletes from being able to meet and socialize with other athletes	11
Stress	Athletes stated stress impacted their athlete experience. This was primarily related to a fear of testing positive for Covid	6

<b>CODE</b>	<b>CODE MEANING</b>	<b>CODE COUNT</b>
COVID Illness	Athletes who tested positive for Covid were forced to quarantine and/or leave the country without competing	6
Travel to Venues	Travel to venues was difficult	5
Poor Performance	The athlete performed below they hope and/or expectations	5
Competition Venue	The competition venue did not meet the standards of the athletes	4
Communication	Communication to the athletes from the NOC organizers created problems for the athletes	3
Fairness	Athletes reported issues with fairness during competition	2
Housing	Housing in the olympic village did not meet the standards of the athletes	2
Team Problems	Challenges within a specific NOC team created problems for an athlete	2
Weather	The weather in Beijing represented a problem for the athletes	2
Doping Control	There were challenges related to doping control	1
IOC Support	The IOC did not provide necessary support in certain areas	1
Politics	The politics of the games (specifically the threat of war between Russia and Ukraine) impacted the athletes	1

The number one reason why athletes indicated a poor experience was due to Covid-19 restrictions. As this paper will discuss later in this section, Covid-19 cast a dark shadow over the games, modifying much, if not all of the experiences of the athletes. The athletes indicated the lack of freedom of movement, the difficulties of daily testing, and that having to quarantine interrupted normal routines and expectations of an Olympic Games.

The athletes passionately shared Food significantly impacted their overall experience - explaining the poor quality and lack of variety of the food diminished their time in Beijing:

*Food also could be better and each day it was the same, so with time when you are living there for almost a month you get really bored.*

*The food was terrible which is not a good thing for an athlete that will be performing for a long time in the most important event in your career*

*The food was terrible to be honest. No changes were made throughout and it wasn't exactly the best nutrition for athletes.*

To understand why the food was problematic for athletes, IntelliSport Analytics asked interviewees how the lack of variety and poor quality impacted their experience:

*[The] food was a bit of a struggle. [At] the start of the games, in our village there were two levels. And the first couple of days, there weren't a lot of athletes, but when athletes started coming in and they didn't open the upper levels, so you had to wait for coffee for about 20 minutes. This wasn't the food, it was kind of an organization thing.*

*So as for me personally as an athlete, I didn't think it had a big effect [the food]. For me personally it was just annoying, every day you would be, "Oh, we're going to eat the same thing again." So the excitement level for going to the food hall was not great.*

*The variety and quality of food was poor. But that's pretty standard. I don't think I've been to one Olympics that had good food, to be honest.*

The athlete experience at these Olympic Games was impacted by the Atmosphere felt during practice, competition and participation in the games, as well as the Socialization Restrictions due to Covid-19. The athletes shared, the Olympic Games atmosphere was muted, including the sense of community and shared experience with athletes from around the world. The athletes detailed part of the joy and expectations of the Olympic Games is meeting athletes from all over the world, and this was not possible due to the Covid-19 restrictions in place.

*I didn't feel like I was in the Olympics because I couldn't watch any other sports.*

*There was nothing about the Olympic spirit. You didn't get to know new people from different continents because everybody was afraid of getting covid. The rules were unnecessarily strict in too many ways.*

*I don't like the vibe of the Olympics here. Especially covid and the restrictions created a bad atmosphere.*

*[Having to] stay restricted to the Olympic village and the sports venue. Less of social life and gathering due to covid.*

*The Olympics are about the competition and the medals on the one side but also about meeting other athletes and getting in touch with different sports. Because of the virus everybody was afraid of getting positive and tried to avoid as much contact with other people as possible. After the event you were only allowed to stay in the country for 48h so you didn't really have time to cheer for other athletes. Additionally, the 3 villages were so far away from each other that you could only stay in your own village and watch the sports hosted at your village.*

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These sentiments were echoed by the participants interviewed in this study. When asked specific questions about their experience at the Olympic Games, several of the athletes spoke about how the socialization restrictions diminished the Olympic spirit, resulting in fewer opportunities to connect with other competitors.

*It was a very kind of isolated Games. It's been more about the world coming together, this Olympic family making connections. In these Games we were instructed to stay away from anyone and just don't talk to the other teams from the other countries. Like we couldn't really hang out that much, you know? So yeah, it was all really disconnected versus just before it was all about connecting. I was expecting that it would be like a fun time when I can connect with other athletes from my team, from anywhere around the world, like this [would be a] really cool time, but eventually I was just sitting in my room and it was miserable.*

.....

*Having the games during the pandemic was very tough. It was very difficult to experience the social aspects that are usually really fun. Out of the five Olympics I went to, the vibe of [this] Olympic spirit was the lowest.*

.....

*Yeah, I think daily life, not being able to mingle too much with the other athletes probably is the biggest effect on me and not being able to go see other events as well.*

.....

*The part I really like [is] to communicate with other people from other countries, with other religions, other interests. This time it really wasn't gonna happen because of the pandemic. I just find it interesting how other people think, how they grow up or how they practice, what their venues are about. And I found it really, really interesting just to get to know something about their lives because every country's a little bit different. And I like to get an insight into different cultures, different religions, different countries, languages, whatever. And for me it's one part I could not experience in Beijing, which I really enjoyed in Pyeongchang. So that for me was the big difference.*

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The reasons offered by the athletes for rating their experiences at the 2022 Winter Olympic Games in Figure 5 as *terrible, very poor, poor, or fair or neutral* point to a myriad of reasons that are not easily categorized. Yet, three out of the top four comments in Figure 5 directly correlate to the mitigating factors of Covid-19. Covid-19 prevented the NOC organizers as well as the athletes from operating in ways that were normal in previous Olympic Games.

Despite the influence of Covid-19 over these games, many of the athletes highly rated their experiences. However, when asked why they highly rated the Games, the athletes offered a mix of positive and negative factors that influenced their experiences Figure 6 details the emergent themes:

**FIGURE 6: Reasons for Positive Experience Ratings of Games**

<b>CODE</b>	<b>CODE MEANING</b>	<b>CODE COUNT</b>
COVID Context	COVID was inevitably part of the experiences of the OG, but the Chinese NOC made the best of it and provided the opportunity to compete at the OG	40
Positive Experiences	Athletes reported overall positive experiences, as they related to being at the games (opening ceremony, competing, athlete socialization)	37
Organization	The Chinese NOC organization of the games was competent and executed a high level competition environment	31
Food (Negative)	The food was report to be poor and did not meet the nutritional needs of the athletes	15
Friendliness of Staff	The staff workers of the Chinese NOC were friendly and helpful to the athletes	12
Competition Venues	The athletes reported the competition venues were excellent and were a great stage for competition	12
Atmosphere	The experience of the OG, meaning the feelings, personal experiences, energy of the games created a positive atmosphere	8
Olympic Village	The Olympic Village was provided excellent housing and opportunities for the athletes to relax and recover	8
Socialization Restrictions (Negative)	The athletes felt they did not have good opportunities to socialize and meet athletes from different parts of the world	7
Food	The food was reported as good and met the nutritional needs of the athletes	6
Family / Fans (Negative)	The athletes missed having family and fans in attendance to cheer them on during competition	6

<b>CODE</b>	<b>CODE MEANING</b>	<b>CODE COUNT</b>
Olympic Village (Negative)	The Olympic Village did not provide adequate housing (issues of flooding and heating)	6
Poor Performance (Negative)	Having a poor athletic performance at the OG negatively impacted an athletes experience	5
Opportunity to Compete	The athletes were grateful they had an opportunity to compete at the OG	4
Covid Safety	The COVID safety procedures ensured that athletes stayed safe and were not exposed to COVID	4
Good Performance	Athletes reported having peak level performances at the OG	4
Poor Atmosphere (Negative)	The energy of the OG was not what the athletes expected. This was especially apparent to athletes who competed at other OG	4
Transportation (Negative)	Transportation often took too long, or it was too far to travel between venues	3
Positive Socialization	The athletes described having positive experiences socializing with other athletes	2
Politics of Games (Negative)	The overriding politics of the games (Russia v. Ukraine) were felt by the athletes at the games	2
Organization (Negative)	The organization of the games was reported to be poor, leading to confusion	2
Opening Ceremony	Participating in the OG opening ceremony was reported as a highlight of the games.	1
Translation Services	The NOC provided adequate translation services to help with the language barriers	1

CODE	CODE MEANING	CODE COUNT
Transportation	The transportation to venues met the needs of the athletes	1
Competition Venue (Negative)	The competition venues did not meet the expectations of the athletes	1
Training Facilities (Negative)	The training facilities did not meet the needs of the athletes	1
Translation Services (Negative)	There were language barriers between the Chinese NOC and athletes from other countries	1

The number one reason athletes reported a positive experience at the Games was an acknowledgement of the impact of Covid-19, but an expression of gratitude to the Chinese NOC for keeping athletes safe and providing an opportunity to compete. Athletes shared the following comments on *Covid Context*:

*Organization was very good. We were safe [from] Covid as we had to do tests every day. It was not perfect but under the circumstances it was a pretty good experience.*

*This was my fifth Olympics and from an organizational and domestic point of view everything was well organized despite the Cov19 situation.*

*Due to covid it definitely was different than usual. But they tried to make it comfortable for the athletes.*

*I think the games were organized really well, and given the covid situation handled really professionally.*

The role of Covid-19 on the Games did not prevent all athletes from having a *Positive Experience*, in fact many of the athletes reported positive experiences despite the limitations placed on the Games. Athletes still found ways to support teammates and competitors alike, engage safely in the opening ceremonies and build relationships with other athletes.



*I had a really good time. Met amazing people. Learn[ed] a lot from this experience. I had a great time cheering [for the] Polish team.*

*It was [an] amazing experience for me, [my] first Olympics. My results weren't satisfying for me, but I collected life lessons, I learned about me, my emotions and I met a lot of amazing people.*

*Because I was enjoying it so much! And also I'm really satisfying with what I did during my competition!*

*The conditions that prevailed were peculiar but they taught me a great lesson. It is worth appreciating every difficult situation because it makes us better. The results I achieved were above my expectations*

*I learned that I still have a long road to the top, but I am grateful to have the possibility to know that. Also I learned that those best athletes, they are also humans and nice guys who do the same thing as me.*

In addition to these major findings, the athletes pointed to the Chinese NOC Organization, the Friendliness of Staff, and Competition Venues as major contributors to their positive experiences. These themes explain how the Chinese NOC took many deliberate steps to ensure the athletes were provided the best opportunities to train, compete and have a positive experience.

*The organization was fantastic. The facilities had everything needed.*

*The volunteers are so nice. All the buildings and the residences are clean and quiet. And for alpine skiing, the conditions are very nice, the slopes are perfect.*

*The atmosphere, volunteers, organization, scheduling, venues and overall execution of the games was excellent.*

*Organizing the games during the pandemic seemed like it would be impossible. My team and I were surprised how good the Olympics were organized (travel process , venues and village). Of course it was not perfect and I think for everyone a challenge to get to Beijing. Especially for smaller nations it was hard to follow the guidelines and to manage the whole team. We loved the really good organized village and venues. The short ways to the gondola, transportation, dining hall and test center were awesome. You could see that they planned a lot in advance to make it easy to get from one place to the other. On the other side they also forgot little things like they didn't separate female and male accommodations. Also really good was that even without understanding Chinese language we could communicate due to mobile translators. So all in all my team and I got a really friendly treatment and really enjoyed our short stay.*

*My own feelings were not ok during the whole season, but the organization on the Olympics was in a really high level. It was a pleasure to be there*

The Olympic volunteers positively impacted the athletes in several ways:

*The volunteers were very cheerful and helpful as well.*

*Organizers really tried to provide the best conditions for all the athletes on the slopes.*

*My room's roof was leaking water, the room was very cold, and the food wasn't the best. But everyone was friendly and helped the best they could.*

*Because the areas were amazing, people in the village were very nice and I think it was the best you could do because of covid.*

The competition venues also were a highlight for many of the athletes:

*Slopes were prepared well.*

.....  
*And for alpine skiing, the conditions is very nice, the slopes is perfect.*

.....  
*Great facilities and working environment!*

.....  
*The positives are the venue was excellent and the biathlon events ran very smoothly.*

Interestingly, athletes who rated their experiences as either *very good* or *excellent* still offered criticisms that negatively impacted their experiences at the Games. Citing *Food, Socialization Restrictions, Family and Fans, Olympic Village, Poor Performance, Transportation*, and the *Politics of the Games*, stood out as reasons for a diminished experience. These findings indicate additional research is needed to understand why some athletes were more resilient than others, rating their experiences higher. Below are sample quotes highlighting these themes:

*[Due to] restrictions, the power of the fans and Chinese culture wasn't how it could be.*

.....  
*[I was] sad that there was no family [allowed].*

.....  
*There were no spectators so that was a bit sad.*

.....  
*It was well organized and a nice experience, however, the political situation in the host country deserved a deduction.*

.....  
*Very stressful with Covid and political tensions. But it didn't take away from the overall experience too much.*

.....  
*Because I showed a bad result, in general everything is fine, but something went wrong.*

.....  
*It took 45min-90min to get to our ice hockey rink so that was a long time to sit on a bus every day.*

.....  
*Transportation from and to the airport was complicated with a big language barrier. Especially to the airport where there was a lack of organization and the bus was late. Also the bus driver seemed to get lost on the way to the airport.*

.....

This study also asked the athletes to identify their most meaningful and worst experiences at the Olympic Games. Identifying these peak and valley experiences provided additional insight into what specific experiences drove positive and negative outcomes. Figure 7 details the responses of athletes to the question: “What was your best experience at the Olympics?”

**FIGURE 7: What Was Your Best Experience at the Olympics?**

<b>CODE</b>	<b>CODE MEANING</b>	<b>CODE COUNT</b>
Opportunity to Compete	Overall happiness to have the opportunity to compete, especially considering Covid context	49
Opening / Closing Ceremony	The experiences of the opening and closing ceremonies were memorable and exciting	40
Socializing with Athletes	Enjoyed the opportunity to meet athletes from other countries and make friendships	31
Competition Venue	The OG competition venues exceeded the expectations of the athletes	22
Olympic Village	The olympic village provided great housing and opportunities to relax	19
Atmosphere	The atmosphere (spirit) of the OG were exciting	14
Good Performances	Successful performances on the OG competition state were peak experiences	10
Winning an OG Medal	The joy of winning an OG medal	9

CODE	CODE MEANING	CODE COUNT
Team Competition	Feelings of happiness associated with competing with a team	6
Level of Competition	The experience of the OG, meaning the feelings, personal experiences, energy of the games created a positive atmosphere	5
Represent Country	Feeling of pride representing home country	3
Food	Enjoyed the food and dining hall	3
OG Apparel	Receiving OG apparel	2
Medical Support	The medical support provided to athletes ensured a good experience	2

The responses not only mirrored some of the previous themes identified by the athletes, but also narrowed what experiences most impacted their time at the Games. Specifically, *Opportunity to Compete* and the *Opening/Closing Ceremonies* were the most impactful for the athletes, with nearly 50% of the respondents offering one or both of these as the best experience of the Games.

*Hard to choose one, all was great, but the most important was my competition.*

*Being able to compete and feel the Olympic spirit during the races.*

*The best experience is the opening and closing ceremony. The most emotional part is the day race.*

*The opening ceremony and of course my main events.*

*Win a gold medal. Opening ceremony was awesome too.*

*Walking into the stadium during opening ceremonies. So cool!*

*The open ceremony made me feel part of a family, meeting new people, other cultures.*

Additionally, *Socializing with Athletes* emerged as a constant indicator for why the athletes had positive experiences at the Games. The ability to interact, build relationships and learn about other people and their cultures is an integral part of the Olympic Games experience.

*Seeing friends I haven't seen in a long time.*

*Spending some time with other athletes from Czech team.*

*Living in the Olympic village, getting to know all other athletes and looking at what they do to be so good - this really inspires me. Plus I like that all the athletes have equal conditions for living.*

*The social room in the nation building. Being able to be with other people from different sports.*

*I am always fascinated by the other sports and athletes, the exchange in general.*

The study also examined the most prevalent reasons why athletes reported poor experiences at the Olympic Games. The study asked the participants: “What was your worst experience at the Olympics?” Figure 8 details the responses of athletes to this question:

**FIGURE 8: What Was Your Worst Experience at the Olympics?**

CODE	CODE MEANING	CODE COUNT
COVID General	The challenges and difficulties due to COVID	50
Food	Food did not meet the needs/standards of the athletes	43
Travel	Challenges and difficulties with travel	27
Performance	Athlete disappointed with performance	27
Isolation	Isolation due to COVID	20
Environment	The competition environment was disappointing	20
Weather	Challenges and difficulties with weather	13
Village	Challenges and difficulties in the Olympic Village	11
Team Challenges	Conflict between teammates	4

CODE	CODE MEANING	CODE COUNT
Communication	Athlete unable to communicate with Olympic Host volunteers	4
Privacy	Lack of athlete privacy due to COVID	3
Venue	Competition venue did not meet the needs/standards of the athletes	3
Doping	Issues surrounding doping	2
Performance Restrictions	Covid restrictions hampered performance	1
Doping_Control	Challenges with doping control	1

This role of *Covid-19 General* emerged as the most significant factor that led to a poor experience for an athlete at the Olympic Games. Nearly twenty-five percent of all respondents attributed Covid-19 as the number one factor that contributed to a poor experience.

*Having to deal with all the Covid bullshit.*

.....

*My isolation (due to close contact with positive guy) in olympic village.*

.....

*The travel and testing-policy beforehand.*

.....

*Covid, masks and I wanted to visit some interesting places in China, not only villages. but of course it is difficult due to covid.*

.....

*The covid strategy (especially the compulsory for vaccination).*

.....

*Seeing people I know missing their event because they got a positive covid test and had to go to the quarantine hotel.*

.....

*The fences and feeling of being locked in.*

.....

*Getting false positive covid test moments before entering the opening ceremony and missing my competition due to it.*

.....

*It was a feeling that corona took some of the moments away. We couldn't sing the national anthem, we couldn't be together as a team as we used to. Some were in isolation because of a positive test, even though they already had it. Feeling some rules should just be there for being rules, not for making a difference.*

.....

Additionally, *Travel* (difficulty getting to the Olympic Games and travel to/from venues at the Olympic Games) and *Performance* (personal dissatisfaction with individual competitive performance) emerged as two important factors that diminished the experiences of the participants. While these were mentioned in Figure 8, these factors were not overwhelmingly reported as modifying the experiences of the athlete. When asked specifically for their worst experience, however, *Travel* and *Performance* were identified as key reasons for poor experiences.

*When we arrive at Beijing Airport, it seems like another world, like the time was stopped 2 years before.*

*Being abandoned by the bus on our way to the village and spending 1hr+ in -7° with no communication on when/if the bus would come back.*

*Transport from the airport. It took so long, the driver missed the right way like 5 times (and it was already after one week of the official start of Olympics).*

*Very slow commute between village and venue.*

*The absolutely monstrous clusterfuck that was transportation to anywhere and the logistics surrounding. To/from the airport, to/from the venue, to/from the Ceremonies, etc.*

*Flying out. The waiting time at the airport was too long, especially with no food or drink provided.*

*Having to race while sick. We had no alternate for the relay. I was so sick. I thought the team doc wouldn't give me the ok to race but he did, and I did horrible, so [I] ruined my team's race and chance to get funding for the next year.*

*The day of my race I had journalists and people telling me that I got the last one [place], it was true but I felt sad and depressed because they didn't know all the effort I did to be there with no help. To be the first [country] in that sport. The day of my race it was a year without seeing my family and friends, and they don't know that.*

*Falling in the 500m.*

*My race. It was my mistake but also the track was really poor.*

*Negative opinions about my results, I felt very bad when I got stupid and worthless commentaries, because my results were bad. I gave my best on the Olympic.*

An important finding from this question was the role *Isolation* had on the athletes during the Olympic Games. The athletes explained Covid-19 forced the athletes to be isolated due to testing positive for Covid-19 and being considered close-contact exposed to Covid-19. If this was the case, the athletes would have to self-isolate away from athletes. Below are comments from athletes on having to isolate themselves:

*Definitely testing positive for Covid and being looked in a tiny room where neither windows nor WIFI was working. The food was awful, I got the same spaghetti with ragu for lunch and dinner for 7 days without exception. Being locked in a tiny room not knowing when you get out is very taxing on your mental health, add to that the problem of not being able to connect to your loved ones cause the WIFI is not working.*

*My isolation (due to close contact with a positive guy) in the Olympic village.*

*Not being able to explore outside the villages.*

*Terrible communication in quarantine.*

*The fences and feeling of being locked in.*



The experiences of athletes at the 24th Winter Olympics Games were unsurprisingly heavily impacted by the presence of Covid-19. This phenomenon modified the normal routines of the athletes – how they practiced, competed, traveled, interacted with other athletes among other significant factors. While some of the athletes highly rated their experiences at the Games, even these athletes pointed to how Covid-19, the quality of the food, and the socialization restrictions among other factors muted certain aspects of their experience. Additional research is needed to examine the resilience of athletes and how this determines their experience at an Olympic Games.

### **Quantitative Analysis of Athlete Experience**

The purpose of this study was to examine how athletes experienced the 24th Winter Olympic Games. Integral to understanding the athlete sentiment is exploring how athletes of different genders and age groups rated the various services at the Games and the degree to which the IOC upheld its mission as defined by its principles. This section will only discuss the experience score tests; refer to Part II for the Principles score tests.

#### **Gender:**

The counts of male and female athletes are show below in Figure 9:

**FIGURE 9: Sample Size (Gender) Experience Ratings**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Sample Size (n)</b>
Female	76
Male	85

P-values of regression results are shown below In Figure 10 for each experience question, with \*\*\* indicating significance between men and women:

**FIGURE 10: P-value(s) Experience (Gender)**

<b>Question</b>	<b>P-value(s)</b>
How would you rate the athlete accommodations (housing)	0.138256
How would you rate the variety and quality of food available	0.002572***



Question	P-value(s)
How would you rate the friendliness of Olympic staff and volunteers	0.375206
How would you rate wifi access	0.032647***
How would your rate translation services	0.067783
It was easy to meet and share experiences with athletes from other Olympic countries	0.056497
My country NOC supported my needs as an athlete	0.087560
It was easy to travel to and from the competition venue	0.476414
It was easy to travel to and from the training venue	0.334093
The competition atmosphere was positive for athletes	0.723173
The media accurately reported the events in which I competed	0.457391
The media was respectful of my time	0.206828
My events at the Olympic Games were broadcasted in my home country	0.652628

The only significant differences found between genders related to food and wifi access. Researchers elected to forgo follow up tests to determine the direction of difference due to how few ratings returned significant and how minor the issues seemed.

### Age Group:

The counts of U25 athletes and athletes 25 & up are shown below in Figure 11. These factor levels were chosen to ensure similar sample size between age groups.

**FIGURE 11: Sample Size (Age) Experience Ratings**

Age Group	Sample Size (N)
Under 25	71
25 & Older	90

P-values of regression results are shown below In Figure 12 for each experience question, with \*\*\* indicating significance between age groups:

**FIGURE 12: P-value(s) Experience (Age)**

Question	P-value(s)
How would you rate the athlete accommodations (housing)	0.376167
How would you rate the variety and quality of food available	0.51922
How would you rate the friendliness of Olympic staff and volunteers	0.699057
How would you rate wifi access	0.298407
How would your rate translation services	0.57724
It was easy to meet and share experiences with athletes from other Olympic countries	0.322408
My country NOC supported my needs as an athlete	0.566898
It was easy to travel to and from the competition venue	0.479446
It was easy to travel to and from the training venue	0.810825
The competition atmosphere was positive for athletes	0.025255***
The media accurately reported the events in which I competed	0.1021
The media was respectful of my time	0.844423
My events at the Olympic Games were broadcasted in my home country	0.365397

Though researchers only found one significance, the question about a positive competition atmosphere was considered worth testing further. See Figure 13.

**FIGURE 13: Positive Competition Atmosphere (Age)**

Term	Coefficient	p-value
Intercept	5.0667	.0000
U25 Dummy Variable	.5249	.0253***

Given the exploratory nature of this study, researchers focused on identifying significant differences between groups. For example, the athletes in this study were asked to rate the competition atmosphere. U25 athletes, on average, rated 5.6 (between somewhat agree and agree) while 25 & up athletes rated significantly lower at 5.1 (also between somewhat agree and agree). Policy makers must decide whether or not such implied disparities between genders or age groups require research and policy. Future data collection and larger sample sizes should include other demographic groups to achieve these goals.

Perhaps more concerning is that for questions about athlete satisfaction with the services and atmosphere of the Games, the 50% Top Box score that is considered good was not met for over half of the categories (See Figure 3).

- The data on the overall experience of athletes at the 24th Winter Olympic Games revealed a complex environment – athletes reported both positive and negative experiences, but the limitations placed on the athletes represented the most significant mark left on the individuals. The NOC Olympic Games Organizers took necessary precautions to protect the athletes from Covid-19, but the consequence of these actions was the partial loss of the Olympic spirit and the ability to socialize with other athletes from around the world. The athletes explained outside of competition, basking in the environment of the Olympics and building relationships with other athletes was important to their overall experience. The inability to maximize these two experiences rest solely on the negative externalities of Covid-19.

## COVID-19

Covid-19 changed the face and operation of the 24th Winter Olympic Games like no other Olympic Games before it. Dubbed the “Logistic Games,” athletes were subjected to an enormous number of protocols to curb the spread of Covid-19, including rigorous daily testing, quarantine, limited social interaction, and being stuck in an athlete bubble (Keh, 2022). This study asked the athletes to share their experiences of the safety and wellness protocols that were implemented by NOC China. Figure 14 shares the athletes opinion on how well they felt protected from Covid-19. An overwhelming majority of the athletes indicated the safety protocols were effective (Top-box 65%) and most were satisfied with the protocols (Top-box 55%).

**FIGURE 14: Outlook on Covid-19 Safety**

ITEM	N	MEAN
Covid-19 protocols were effective	232	5.41
I was satisfied with Covid-19 safety protocols	232	5.05

The athletes who participated in this study were asked if they tested positive for Covid-19 during the Olympic Games. Seventeen athletes indicated they tested positive during the Games and had to enter quarantine protocol. The researchers were interested in how quarantine affected the athletes physically and mentally. Figure 15 details how quarantine impacted the athletes:

**FIGURE 15: Covid-19 Quarantine Impact**

ITEM	Yes	No
I had to quarantine due to testing positive for Covid-19	17	173
ITEM	N	MEAN
I had a positive experience during quarantine	17	3.53
I struggled mentally during quarantine	17	5.59
I was able to maintain my physical conditioning during quarantine	17	4.35

I was supported by my NOC (National Olympic Committee) during quarantine

17

5.00

The data indicates the athletes required to quarantine due to testing positive for Covid-19 struggled both physically and mentally. Unsurprisingly, the athletes reported a top-box of only 18% for the question “I had a positive experience during quarantine.” In addition, 64% of the athletes reported they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I struggled mentally during quarantine.” This was similarly the case for the athletes trying to maintain their physical condition while in quarantine, with few reporting they were able to maintain their form. Despite these challenges, most of the athletes reported their NOCs supported them through the difficulties of quarantine.

To understand in greater depth the role of Covid-19, interview participants were asked additional questions to understand how Covid-19 impacted their experience. Coding the athlete conversations revealed the following emergent themes in Figure 16:

**FIGURE 16: Covid-19 Qualitative Coding**

<b>CODE</b>	<b>CODE MEANING</b>
Covid Logistics	Logistical challenges were encountered due to Covid
Covid Negative	Covid negatively impacted the experience of the athlete.
Covid Stress	The fear of contracting Covid stressed athletes due to the ramifications it would have on their ability/opportunity to compete
Covid Threat	Covid threatened the day-to-day life (competition, practice) of the athletes.
Performance Restrictions	Covid restrictions hampered performance
Doping Control	Challenges with doping control

Covid-19 disrupted the athletes’ ability to behave in normal ways leading up to their competition and it interfered with normal travel to/from the country due to quarantine and testing requirements. Additionally, Covid-19 cloaked the participants with a sense of stress and fear due to the ramifications of testing positive and the additional precautions that needed to be taken to avoid testing positive. These burdens disrupted any sense of normality at the Games.

## Covid-Logistics

The comments shared by the participants detail how Covid-19 disrupted how they moved throughout the Olympic Games. The comments are unique to each individual and highlight how Covid-19 impacted the athletes in a wide variety of ways:

*I really think that letting us run outside of the premises of the Olympic village, it would not have increased risks in any way but would've helped our experience tremendously. I was in the middle of nowhere and if I go around outside for 15 minutes, that would've been like so freeing to do, but at the same time, like I wouldn't have seen a single person. I think those are the kinda of stuff they could've done to improve the experience. And you are not increasing the risks at all. So some of the small things like that or is it really necessary that you should wear masks when you're outside and there's nobody around you? Is it really that necessary? Probably not. When on the ski course you can be around hundreds of other people. So, just [make] the rules, a little bit more reasonable.*

.....

*Athlete: Well, basically he got into quarantine and for me it meant that they asked me if I wanted to stay there for a while, but as I was a close contact person, I would be in quarantine all the time. So I could leave within 24 hours, then I would not get into this Chinese close contact pool so I could leave. Otherwise, like if I would have stayed a little longer there, then I couldn't have even left because I would be a potentially positive case. So basically I left straight away, like, I don't know, a few hours later I had to leave.*

.....

*Consultant: Wow. So how long had you been in China at that point?*

*Athlete: Less than 24 hours. <Laugh>.*

*Consultant: So you got there and then left in 24 hours?*

*Athlete: Yes. Yes.*

.....

## Covid-Negative

The presence of Covid-19 prevented some athletes from competing, even when they did not test positive themselves. In the case below, one half of a figure skating pair tested positive for Covid-19. Both athletes were forced to leave the country and miss their competition.

*Consultant: Did the IOC help you in any way [following positive Covid-19 test]?*

*Athlete: I think in this situation, an athlete who was working for so many years to get to the Olympics, like in our case, was not about to win. It was just to get there and we had dreams of being in the top 10, but we didn't fight for medals, it was not about the medals, it was about participating. I think it's very hard to, it wouldn't matter if somebody would come up to me at this moment and say, "hey, I'm very sorry." ... I would say that I'm not thinking about this still. I'm lucky enough to have a really good surrounding and really supportive people at home and I'm doing other things I'm studying. But I guess it still affects me in the way of thinking "what if." I know that there might be even papers confirming that I'm an Olympian I guess, but I don't know, whenever a conversation comes up, I always have to say that I was at the Olympics, but I didn't compete. So yeah, I think it's still kinda a thing that's, I'm not completely over it.*

.....

## Covid-Stress

Covid-19 put significant physical and mental stress on the athletes, but the athletes stated there was little they could do to mitigate this stress. China's zero tolerance left no recourse for athletes who tested positive, or had false positive tests. This put the athletes under increased stress and they felt helpless in preventing a positive test.

*Not once we were there. I think the, the biggest frustration with the whole Covid thing was like China had this kind of zero tolerance and so that was just like a huge amount of stress for athletes, coaches, staff, like leading into the games cuz you're trying your best to not get covid, but I mean there's only so much you can do*

.....  
*Consultant: Was there anything that could have mitigated that stress do you think? Leading up to the games?*

*Athlete: Honestly, no. The only thing that could do it is if China would say, "oh okay, yeah, we have an exception for athletes like for the Olympics because the big games will make an exemption where if you have code with you, you can still come, you can still potentially compete." Versus the whole, like their whole thing was like, yeah, if you get covid within 10 days, two weeks, whatever, don't plan on coming and that is super stressful. Especially cause it seems like covid at that point especially is so out of your control in a lot of ways. Like you could be doing everything you think you can to minimize risk, but then you'll just get it. That's 100% out of control. So yeah, I think barring that, I know the IOC I think was trying to ease up a little bit, but there's [only] much they could do.*

## Covid-Threat

Covid-19 was a constant threat for the athletes due to the fear of testing positive and the possibility of missing their competitive events. Despite taking as many precautions as possible, the athletes felt helpless and there was little they could do to prevent a positive test due to the seemingly randomness of the illness. The athletes felt genuine fear over what a positive test would mean for their ability to compete, socialize with other athletes and their status as an Olympian.

*I think that the overriding theme, like taking away the personal health issues, that those were the games of fear because everyone was so afraid to get sick.. And there were all those countermeasures, which of course they were necessary, but at every second or anything you did, you were reminded of that, of the threat, you know? So it was the first few days or the first week was maybe more, and then you could see people relaxing more because, everyone was keeping an eye on like the covid numbers, how many people were getting sick that were in the village, how many people were getting sick that were coming in. And so it was just really scary.*

.....  
*I just wanna explain that there was a lot of mistrust similar to the doping issues that I expressed, but the way that the [covid-19] testing was done daily and there were athletes showing concern that if they were a medal threat that the Chinese didn't like, or someone didn't like, that they could fake their positive test and just then the ambulance would come and sweep them up and take 'em away. So the whole understanding of the accountability and processes in which things like that can take you out of the game to compete. Having that threat the whole time wasn't super comfortable. I would've liked to see more effort put in to help the athletes feel the love and not the potential punishment [that] was constantly hanging over.*

.....  
*Well I think obviously the covid situation had its impact on the games because I know that a lot of people had extra anxiety and whatever to test positive. So the Olympic spirit in the village for everybody is just like hanging out with everyone. That was obviously not there this time I guess because even before the games we had to fill out all the health products and during the games too.*

*So I think if not the situation with my partner, I think I would be super careful, especially before my competition, who I hang out with and who I make friendships with because potentially they could cause you [to miss] your competition.*

.....

The analysis of the impact Covid-19 revealed an environment where athletes were highly stressed and subjected to challenging safety protocols that disrupted their normal routines. For the athletes who tested positive for Covid-19 during the Games, few had a positive experience, and most struggled with their mental health and ability to stay in peak athletic form. The threat of testing positive for Covid-19 shaped the choices and overall experiences of the athletes at the 24th Winter Olympics Games.

## TRAINING AND COMPETITION

The core purpose for athletes at the Olympic Games is to train and compete in their events. To understand the training and competition experiences of athletes at the 24th Games, this study presented the following statements for the athletes to rate. See Figure 17.

**FIGURE 17: Experience Ratings of Travel and Competition**

ITEM	N	MEAN
It was easy to travel to and from the competition venue	232	5.43
It was easy to travel to and from the training venue	232	5.48
I was satisfied with the medical treatment I received	232	5.70
I valued the experience of competing with mixed (men & women) teams and competition	232	6.02
The training equipment provided by the organizing Olympic Committee was of high quality	232	5.68
The competition equipment provided by the organizing Olympic Committee was of high quality	232	5.98



The competition atmosphere was positive for athletes	232	5.32
--	-----	------

The majority of athletes highly rated this Olympic Games' practice and competition venues, medical treatment, and equipment. See Figure 18 for the top-box ratings:

**FIGURE 18: Top-Box Ratings of Travel and Competition Experience**

ITEM	Top-Box
It was easy to travel to and from the competition venue	66%
It was easy to travel to and from the training venue	67%
I was satisfied with the medical treatment I received	48%
I valued the experience of competing with mixed (men & women) teams and competition	54%
The training equipment provided by the organizing Olympic Committee was of high quality	65%
The competition equipment provided by the organizing Olympic Committee was of high quality	67%
The competition atmosphere was positive for athletes	55%

The lowest top-box rating of these series of rating questions was 48% (I was satisfied with the medical treatment I received), while the average top-box rating was 60%. Overall athletes were generally satisfied with the standards provided by NOC China for training and competing at the Olympic Games.

This study further unpacked these findings by reintroducing participants interviewed with the athlete experience themes measured in this study. While conversing with the athlete over a Zoom teleconference call, a slide deck detailed the themes and the athletes were asked to comment. Interviewees shared the following themes in Figure 19:

**FIGURE 19: Qualitative Codes-Training and Competition**

CODE	MEANING
Competition Environment- Negative	The competition environment was lacking intensity / support due to the ban on spectators
Competition Venue- Positive	The athlete rated the competition venue as a highlight of their experience
Transportation- Negative	Athlete described difficulties with transportation at the OGs

### *Competition Environment- Negative*

*I really liked [the environment] in Pyeongchang, I really like to have the full stadium, that's not usual for us curlers. So I really loved it and I tried to enjoy it. And as you know, there were only Chinese people allowed, beside the coaches and the representatives of the different countries. So we couldn't have our closest ones there or our families there. Let's say, not at the same level of positivity as in Pyeongchang. I would've loved to have some people around if they would've liked to be there, but there was no chance. I think it was a positive atmosphere among the athletes, the coaches. I really tried to focus on the competition and we were prepared for that. But it wasn't at the same intensity, as in Pyeongchang. So that was the difference.*

### *Competition Venue- Positive*

*I thought the venue was better overall. I thought they did a really good job with the biathlon venue itself and the layout of everything and just the flow and the ease of access for athletes, coaches, staff, etc. That was a big positive.*

### *Transportation- Negative*

*We've got so much equipment with skeleton. I had to carry my sled down to the bus stop which was probably a couple of hundred meters. And when you've got a 38 kilo sled along with all your bags, it was some days very challenging and I'd have to try get like one of those airport trolley carts and some days they just weren't there, so I'd have to carry my sled the whole way down. And then maybe the bus times and that were a bit kinda random I guess. Sometimes, there would be a lot of buses available and then sometimes there wouldn't be.*

Despite the challenges of these Olympic Games, NOC China hosted a highly rated Games that met many of the training, competition and travel needs of the athletes. These experience categories were rated highly by the athletes (second only to the Media-see next section) of which several categories scored above 60% top-box. Despite these high ratings, additional investigation is needed to understand how medical services can best meet the needs of athletes.

## MEDIA

The core purpose for athletes at the Olympic Games is to train and compete in their events. To understand the training and competition experiences of athletes at the 24th Games, this study presented the following statements for the athletes to rate. See Figure 20.

**FIGURE 20: Experience Ratings of the Media**

ITEM	N	MEAN
The media accurately reported the events in which I competed	191	5.71
The media was respectful of my time	191	5.91
My events at the Olympic Games were broadcasted in my home country	191	6.04

The majority of athletes highly rated their interactions with the media and the media coverage of the Games. See Figure 21 for the top-box ratings:

**FIGURE 21: Top-Box Ratings of the Media**

ITEM	Top-Box
The media accurately reported the events in which I competed	71%
The media was respectful of my time	77%
My events at the Olympic Games were broadcasted in my home country	80%

Similarly to understanding the competition and training experience of athletes, the researchers presented the athletes with a slide deck during the Zoom teleconference the athlete experience themes measured. Interviewees shared the following themes in Figure 22:

**FIGURE 22: Qualitative Codes- Media**

CODE	MEANING
Media (Issue)	Athletes reported issues with the media
Media (Non-Issue)	Athletes did not have challenges with the media

*Media-Issue*

*I have quite a bit of experience with media in [Country] and a little bit in the States too when I lived there. But I was contacted to give a comment about global warming and artificial snow use and stuff like that. And then they canceled the last minute on me, which was really rude I thought. And not considerate with my time because I had to make sure that this works, with our media schedule and we have a small team so we don't have people coordinating all of our media accountability times super closely. So I'm in charge of that. I was really kind of disappointed that they were just so rude to cancel on [me] last minute. And then eventually it was me who reached out, I was like, "So is this happening?" And they were like, "Oh, I'm sorry. No, it's not, sorry." And I was like, "Thanks for not even letting me know."*

.....

*Would be nice if the reporters would show up on time. We were just leaving the venue, they were "why didn't you go to the entry on the mixed zones?" [We said] "there was nobody there, so we left <laugh>." Overall there was a lot less media than in the 2018 games, but I think that was due to Covid as well, which was actually nice because, media's always a bit of a distraction, so if you don't have to do it, it's nice.*

.....

*Media- Non-Issue*

*I don't remember the media at all. It was cool. It was fine. I think it was very small in comparison to Vancouver, Sochi, Italy.*

.....

*So we had our early media there on site and I think I thought it was really good. Yeah, I got interviewed a couple of times. They were very friendly. They seemed like they were very enthusiastic to learn more about the sport and that I think maybe, this might have been the covid protocols as well, but I feel like they didn't have as good of access as they could have to the competition venues and maybe the village. But yeah, overall I was impressed with the media. I didn't feel like they were intrusive at all. And, like I said, they were very enthusiastic.*

.....

*I don't do a lot of media outside of the Olympics. We don't have anyone there who cares. And then at the Olympics, I do an interview with CBC and that's usually it and it's usually just like how did the day go? My experience is that it's not an issue.*

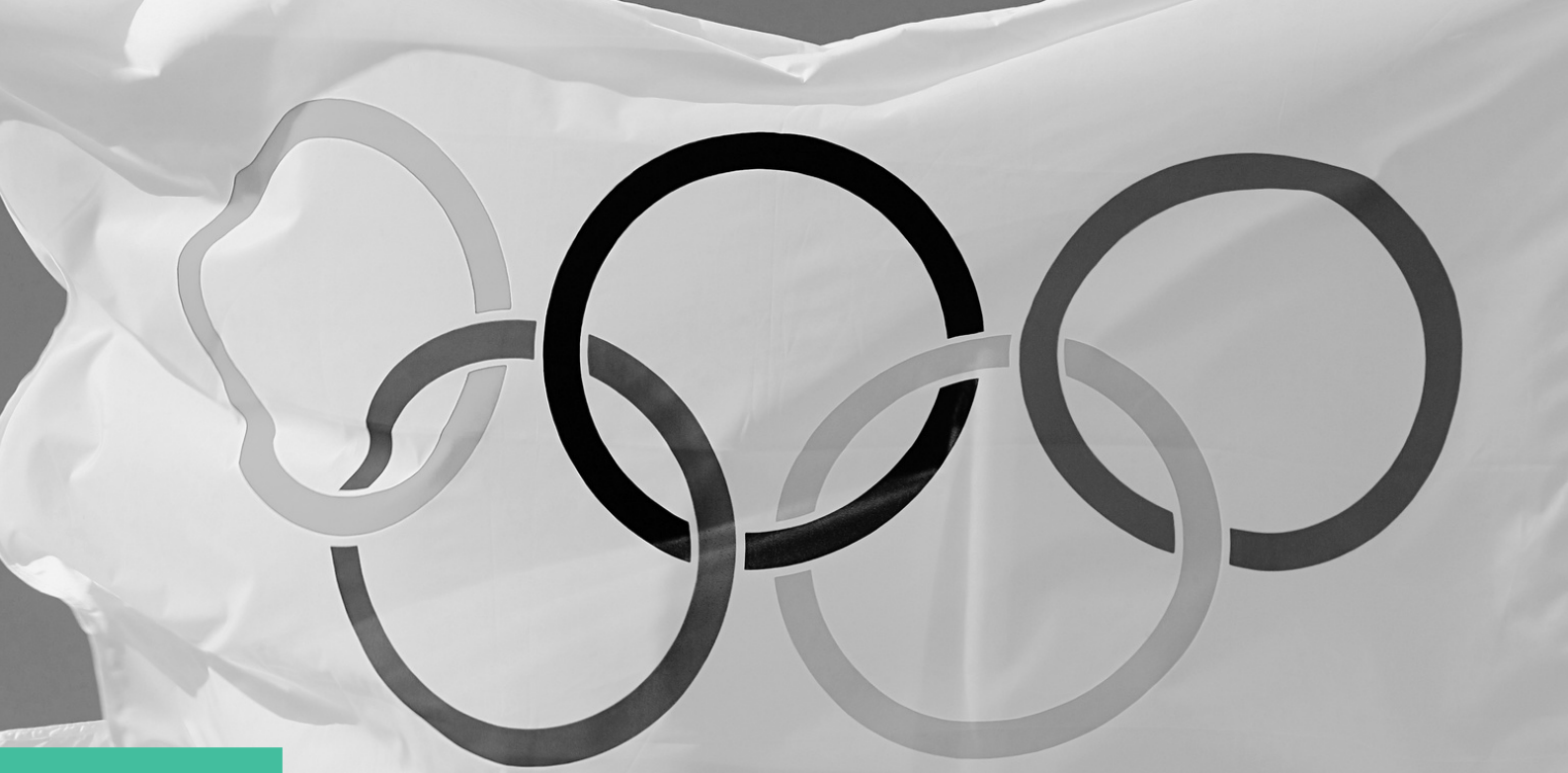
.....



The media coverage of the Olympic Games were the highest rated experience statements by the participants in this study. The media did not place significant burdens on the athletes, but this cross section of data could be misleading if the media focuses a majority of its energy on a few high profile athletes, whose experience may be quite different from the majority of athletes. Additional focused research on the experiences of high profile athletes would reveal if the media impacts the performance and experience of these athletes.

The data from this study on athletes' experiences at the 24th Winter Olympic Games revealed not only a Games hampered by Covid-19, but also a resilience by the athletes

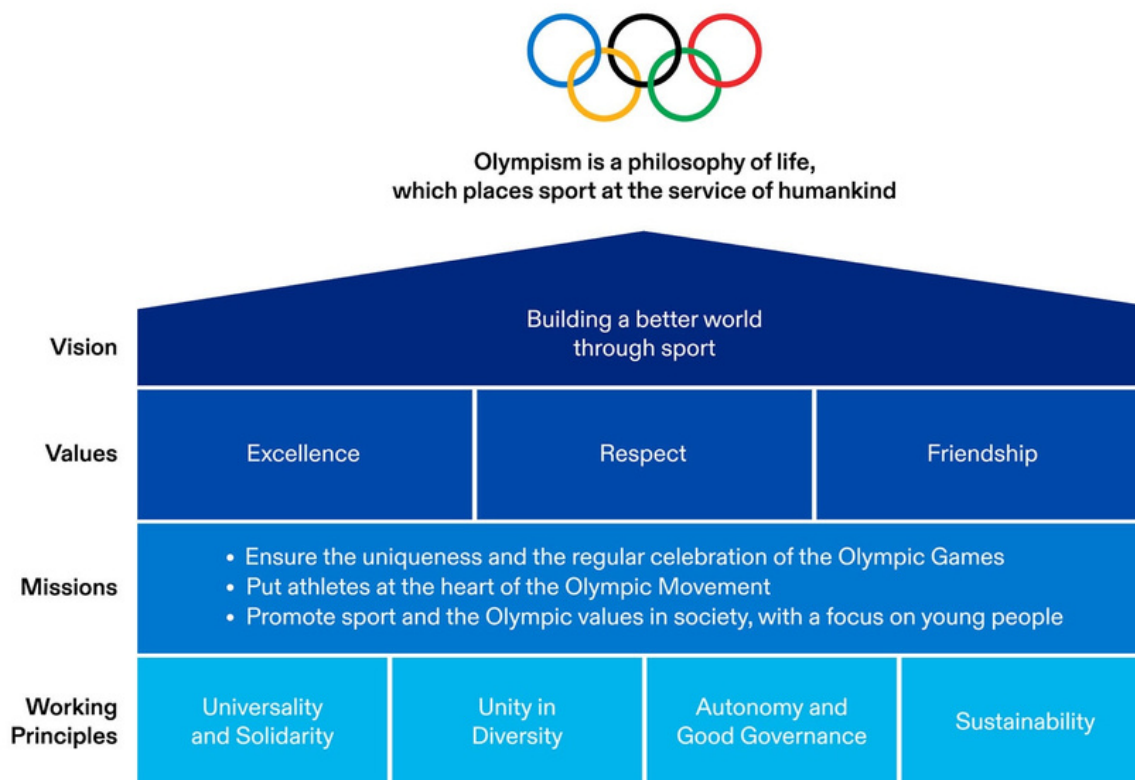
and NOC host China to produce a Games that met the basic standards to allow for competition to proceed. To host these Games, NOC China had to take many drastic precautions to ensure the safety of athletes. These tactics had detrimental effects on the ability of athletes to socialize, move freely, and added additional stress due to the fear and repercussions of testing positive. Additional research is needed to examine why athletes of varying age have different experiences, particularly why younger athletes report having a more positive experience than their older counterparts.



## **PART II – IOC'S OLYMPIC PRINCIPLES**

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is responsible for organizing the Winter, Summer and Youth Olympic Games. The IOC adopted a series of principles that guides its intent and actions for the Olympic movement. The principles include four levels: working principles, missions, values, and vision (See Figure 23)(IOC.com). These four categories seek to “support every Olympic Movement stakeholder, promote Olympism worldwide... promote sport in society, strengthen the integrity of sport and support clean athletes and other sports organizations.” How these core principles impact the experiences and outcomes for athletes who participate in the Olympic Games is unclear. This study examined how well the IOC delivered on its principles and if the principles modified their experiences during the Winter Games. In Figure 24, the athlete participants rated the ten comprehensive areas of the IOC Principles.

**FIGURE 23: IOC Olympic Principles**



**FIGURE 24: Experience Ratings of Olympic Principles**

ITEM	N	MEAN
The IOC built a better world through sport at the 2022 Olympic Games	186	4.61
The IOC promoted excellence at the 2022 Olympic Games	186	5.06
The IOC promoted respect at the 2022 Olympic Games	186	5.28
The IOC promoted friendship at the 2022 Olympic Games	186	5.27
The IOC put athletes at the heart of the 2022 Olympic Games	186	5.07
The IOC promoted sport and the Olympic values in society at the 2022 Olympic Games	186	5.18

ITEM	N	MEAN
The IOC promoted solidarity at the 2022 Olympic Games	186	5.25
The IOC promoted unity in diversity at the 2022 Olympic Games	186	5.35
The IOC promoted autonomy and good governance at the 2022 Olympic Games	186	4.67
The IOC focused on sustainability at the 2022 Olympic Games	186	4.55

The majority of athletes rated the IOC's delivery of the Olympic Principles low. See Figure 25 for the top-box ratings:

**FIGURE 25: Top-Box Ratings Olympic Principles**

ITEM	N
The IOC built a better world through sport at the 2022 Olympic Games	33%
The IOC promoted excellence at the 2022 Olympic Games	48%
The IOC promoted respect at the 2022 Olympic Games	57%
The IOC promoted friendship at the 2022 Olympic Games	53%
The IOC put athletes at the heart of the 2022 Olympic Games	49%
The IOC promoted sport and the Olympic values in society at the 2022 Olympic Games	53%
The IOC promoted solidarity at the 2022 Olympic Games	55%
The IOC promoted unity in diversity at the 2022 Olympic Games	56%
The IOC promoted autonomy and good governance at the 2022 Olympic Games	41%
The IOC focused on sustainability at the 2022 Olympic Games	38%



Following the statistical analysis of the data from the survey, athletes were invited to participate in interviews to share their experiences at the Olympic Games. During these interviews, participants were presented with the ten IOC Principles and were asked the following questions:

1. Did the IOC principles impact your experiences at the 24th Winter Olympic Games?
2. Did the IOC achieve the stated principles during the 24th Winter Olympic Games?

The following commentary reveals how the principles impacted the athletes' experiences and if the IOC successfully achieved the delivery of the principles:

### *IOC Principle- Build a Better World Through Sport*

Athletes commenting on the IOC's success to build a better world through sport were skeptical due to the on-going human rights issues of NOC Olympic Games Host, China. The athletes pointed out that if the IOC was serious about building a better world through sport, there was an inherent conflict due to its awarding of the Games to China. It was hard for some of the athletes to look beyond the human rights issues, especially when China made the decision to have a Uyghur minority individual light the Olympic flame during the opening ceremony (Smith, 2022). This gesture was perceived as white-washing the Games, because it was unclear if China was taking steps to prevent the abuses of this minority ethnic group. Despite this outlook, one athlete shared optimism that the IOC has the capacity to build a better world through sport. The athletes shared the following comments:

*So build back a better world. I know that the Olympics is not supposed to be a political thing and I agree with that in principle, but I also think it's hard not to have politics involved, especially when...I don't care if China competes for example in the Olympics. But I think it's different when you're giving them [the Games to] host. They're a host country despite everything that we know kind of goes on. And that they are just on a human rights level, they're maybe not the top ranked country in the world. So I think the IOC has a responsibility to kind of find a way to balance that out. And so you don't bar them from competing maybe, but you don't also have to give them a super prestigious event like the Olympics. And I think that that's like a whole cheaper thing where it's like, in my opinion, the IOC just is corrupt, as an organization. So that's my opinion. It all just comes down to like money [and] prestige.*

*[The] human rights in China, let's say it's an issue in the western media. So does the IOC build a better world if they give them Olympic Games? I dunno, I just question this. \ I don't wanna point my finger [at] China, but I think in the last couple of years, let's say at least, special countries got Olympic games, even with Russia. Now it's a lot later [than the 24th OG], and we can say they started war with the Ukraine, but even before it was, a lot of things were suspicious about those games, at least what I read in the media. So I can't say yes or no on this one, uh, because I don't really know... I read in media, they're not treating too good [the Uyghur minority] and then, then they make somebody from this region light [the] fire. For me, I had the impression that they want to put themselves in a better light than they are. To show there's no issue with human rights here in China, or that's my point of view.*

*I really think that the Olympics has the possibility to build a better world, bringing people together from all different continents and different backgrounds. I think that could help for, just general progress around the world.*

## IOC Principle- Excellence

The IOC Principle of excellence is not defined specifically by the IOC. The athletes who shared commentary on this principle understood it as the responsibility of the IOC to promote an environment where athletic excellence (high performance sport) could be achieved. The athletes shared the following sentiment:

*I think maybe excellence and promoted sport. When I think of Olympics I think of the best athletes in the world and their sport is put on show...you're waiting four years so you get put on show and that's the image of the Olympics I have is the best of the best competing altogether.*

*Then the excellence, I really think they [IOC] tried to do that, to make the athletes reach their limits or push them to their limits. I think they make the best in our sport, to get the best conditions. So the athletes really can focus on their performance.*

*Excellence. I think athletes and countries embody that. I think they treat the event with respect and they treat each other with respect and it's a competitive environment. Excellence. For most sports it's the top competition. So it's a really big deal.*

## IOC Principle- Put Athletes at the Heart of the Games

A key mission of the IOC is to put the athletes at the heart of the Games. When presented with this concept, two athletes shared skepticism on the IOC's ability and intent to prioritize athletes, specifically related to politics impacting the Games and athlete welfare. The athletes shared the following comments:

*Put the athletes at the heart of the games. I'm not sure [about] that one. I sometimes, [think] it's too political maybe. Opening ceremonies with Mr. Putin being there. Now watching back, I know back then when the Olympics started, there was no war here in Europe. Let's say we at least the relationship between some countries, those two were pretty tense. I think society was a little bit blind to think there won't be a war, or the war won't be started. Maybe this a little bit too political or, or we give the home country a little bit too much space for political stuff.*

*And that goes to also put[ting] athletes at the heart. It's like, well yeah the Olympics is there cuz athletes are competing, but the IOC goes out of its way to make sure that athletes can't benefit in any way from the Olympics leading in and directly after. So there's like a month-long window. You can't mention sponsors, you can't thank sponsors, you can't gain any endorsements. No one can advertise you.*

*There's like really strict rules around that. It's like the IOC is making tons of money and the athletes have no opportunity, there's no prize money, there's no nothing. So in a way you are kind of being used to benefit the IOC. And again, they argue it's because it's amateur sport and we're just celebrating athletics, which is fine, but then it just seems they seem to make a lot of money off something that the athletes don't actually receive any direct compensation for at any level of the Olympics. So I, I also disagree with that.*

## IOC Principle- Promote Sport and the Olympic Values in Society

An additional mission of the IOC is to promote sport and Olympic Values in Society, specifically focusing on young people. The athletes shared a wide array of sentiment of how this principle impacted their experiences:

*I mean, it's twofold because I think that the Olympics itself, you feel the energy, you feel the Olympic spirit. And that's very, very real. And I think that they [IOC] do a great job of promoting that.*

.....  
*Promotion was good. I think the venue was great. I don't know if it was the IOC or our World Federation who was pushing more or promoting more, but, I think this was great. I really think at least they tried to push, push it, push them.*

.....  
*Consultant: Did any of these principles impact you directly during your competition?*

*Athlete: I think they were mostly followed and it's hard to know what's in someone's heart and what are some people's intentions, especially when you're limited contact. But I think the Olympic games are special and it does affect everyone competing there, that it's a special time. It's a very philosophical question.*

.....  
*IOC Principle- Solidarity*

Athletes were critical of the IOC's promotion of solidarity at the Olympic Games. The athletes' attention again focused on the politics of the games, specifically the human rights violations in China.

*Athlete: Unfortunately, I also know the underbelly. I do not feel as though they held to the standard, I don't know how to explain this they gave a Russian a medal at the Olympics. And I know a lot of the athletes were disheartened by that.*

*Consultant: In your discipline, in your sport?*

*Athlete: No, it was during closing ceremonies, they gave out medals and a Russian came and accepted the medal on behalf of the Olympic Russian athlete. So the Russian flag was on the wall and they played the anthem. And they don't hold themselves accountable. It's all good to promote peace and promote love and happiness and friendship, but you can't have respect without accountability.*

.....  
*Consultant: Can I ask you a question? We know more now because we're post games and the war started in Ukraine. When Putin was at the opening ceremonies, was that a positive sign of solidarity, a coming of the world together? Was it first interpreted that way, but now that we know war has started that obviously changes our view on that. Did that change actually happen or was his presence always there sort of hurting solidarity?*

*Athlete: Fair question. Maybe, maybe you're right. But why was the USA president's not invited? It was just Putin and the president of China, Xi Jinping. So, it's just two big guys and, [where] is the solidarity? I don't know, it's kind of a party of the rich guys, of the strong guys. So already we're talking about politics now and shouldn't be the case at the Olympics. That's the sad part of it. It's hard to work against it because you can't, I don't think, you can't avoid that.*

.....  
*If you believe that there's those concentration camps in China, it's impossible. There's no solidarity there. So I just think again, by allowing your event to be host in a country that doesn't view everyone that lives in its country as equal. You just can't say that you promote solidarity or unity and diversity. It's like kind of the same thing.*

## IOC Principle- Unity in Diversity

The athletes did not share many comments on how the IOC's principle of unity in diversity impacted their experiences during the Olympic Games. One athlete shared a belief the IOC needs to be more intentional about how it promotes and grows diversity in sport.

*I think diversity is getting bigger and bigger and I think society, at least how I experience it, we're going the right way. I can't say the IOC did anything against it, but, I don't know if they really promoted it. I think there was a chance to grow the diversity.*

.....

## IOC Principle- Sustainability

The athletes considered the sustainability of the Olympic Games from several lenses: (1) the waste created during the Games; (2) the usage of Olympic venues for future competitions; and (3) the philosophy behind structuring and hosting an Olympic Games. The athletes shared the following outlook:

*The first thing that popped into my head was sustainability <laugh>. And you know, every single day when you went to the cafeteria dining hall, [we] used those plastic dishes, it was just so much waste to create. That was so sad. I really think that, [we] should be reusing at least plates and forks and stuff like that, you know? And it's just an amount of unnecessary waste. And I know that a lot of people started bringing their own plates if they had some with them, cups at least or something. Cause you know, it just felt so wasteful. It was horrible to see.*

.....

*I'm not sure how much of the Olympic objects [facilities] will be used after the Olympic games, because I think that's a great aspect of any Olympic games, but they're not just building something great and then after those two weeks nobody uses it anymore. I haven't done enough research to be sure about whether that's being met or not, because that would be the first criteria if you can make some sustainable sports objects and they are gonna be reused for children doing sports and things like this, that's great. I think in Rio they had a problem with this, that the arenas are not very used after the Olympic games. I think that's an important point.*

.....

*And then sustainability, I was surprised that you could hold winter games in the same city as you had summer games 14 years before. So I don't know how much work they had to put into, to get all these venues [ready]. If the venues are used for the next 20 years, then I agree with that. Otherwise, like we see in different Olympics cities, they're falling apart and are not used anymore. So I don't know about this one, [but the] future maybe will have to tell.*

.....

*Consultant: Do you think the IOC followed through on making the Games more sustainable in China?*

*Athlete: I'm actually not sure to be honest, I haven't really, really checked out the data. I just know they're always saying, "oh, we're more sustainable." I actually can't verify if they actually were right. So I hope it goes in the right direction. But yeah, obviously a big event as the Olympic games is far from sustainable at the moment.*

.....

*Sustainability, I mean, there's absolutely nothing sustainable about the Olympics. Especially when it goes to a country where we will probably never go back to that venue. Right? Like that biathlon venue will likely never get used for an international event ever again. And in my opinion, that's not sustainable.*

.....

To gain a deeper understanding of the Olympic Principles' impact on the athletes, athlete ratings for each guiding principle were investigated by gender and by age.

**Gender:**

The counts of male and female athletes are show below in Figure 26:

**FIGURE 26: Sample Size (Gender) Olympic Principle Ratings**

Gender	Sample Size (N)
Female	76
Male	85

P-values of regression results are shown In Figure 27 for each experience question, with \*\*\* indicating significance between men and women:

**FIGURE 27: P-value(s) Olympic Principles (Gender)**

ITEM	P-value(s)
The IOC built a better world through sport at the 2022 Olympic Games	0.789016
The IOC promoted excellence at the 2022 Olympic Games	0.399679
The IOC promoted respect at the 2022 Olympic Games	0.784669
The IOC promoted friendship at the 2022 Olympic Games	0.968069
The IOC put athletes at the heart of the 2022 Olympic Games	0.874544
The IOC promoted sport and the Olympic values in society at the 2022 Olympic Games	0.924474
The IOC built a better world through sport at the 2022 Olympic Games	0.789016
The IOC promoted excellence at the 2022 Olympic Games	0.399679

ITEM	P-value(s)
The IOC promoted respect at the 2022 Olympic Games	0.784669
The IOC promoted friendship at the 2022 Olympic Games	0.968069
The IOC put athletes at the heart of the 2022 Olympic Games	0.874544
The IOC promoted sport and the Olympic values in society at the 2022 Olympic Games	0.924474

No significant differences were found in how male vs. female athletes rated their impression of each guiding principle.

### Age Group:

The counts of under 25 years of age athletes and athletes 25 & older are shown below in Figure 28:

**FIGURE 28: Sample Size (Age) Olympic Principle Ratings**

Age Group	Sample Size (N)
Under 25	71
25 & Older	90

P-values of regression results are shown in Figure 29 for each mission question, with \*\*\* indicating significance between the two age groups:

**FIGURE 29: P-value(s) Olympic Principles (Age)**

Question	P-value(s)
The IOC built a better world through sport at the 2022 Olympic Games	0.002938***
The IOC promoted excellence at the 2022 Olympic Games	0.219234
The IOC promoted respect at the 2022 Olympic Games	0.038374***

ITEM	P-value(s)
The IOC promoted friendship at the 2022 Olympic Games	0.025329***
The IOC put athletes at the heart of the 2022 Olympic Games	0.058746
The IOC promoted sport and the Olympic values in society at the 2022 Olympic Games	0.032784***
The IOC promoted solidarity at the 2022 Olympic Games	0.032587***
The IOC promoted unity in diversity at the 2022 Olympic Games	0.01451***
The IOC promoted autonomy and good governance at the 2022 Olympic Games	0.007089***
The IOC focused on sustainability at the 2022 Olympic Games	0.146235

For all of the questions found significant, athletes under 25 provided higher ratings than their older counterparts. The younger athletes displayed relatively greater optimism towards the IOC principles.



The rating questions in this study measured athlete satisfaction with how core IOC principles were executed, with the intent to identify if the IOC was following through with their defined purpose and goals. Overall, this study revealed the athletes' skepticism of the IOC's delivery of and commitment to the Olympic Principles.

No significant differences were found between male and female athletes, but many differences were found between U25 and 25 & older athletes. Though younger athletes scored each principle higher, across the entire study sample half of the principles fell below the 50% top box score that is considered good. The IOC will need to examine why it is falling short and how it can best achieve its Olympic Principles.



## PART III – ISSUES IN SPORT DURING THE 24TH WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES

### POLITICS

Leading up to, during, and after the Olympic Games several issues, namely politics and doping in sports dominated the news headlines. In February of 2022, it was reported that Russia was preparing to invade Ukraine, deploying nearly 130,000 troops along the countries' shared border (Nierenberg, 2022). Impending war threatened to violate the long-standing Olympic Truce, a United Nations agreement adopted in 1993 to suspend conflict during any Olympic games. The purpose of this was to “build a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal” (IOC). War did not immediately occur during the 24th Winter Olympic Games, but the threat of war between Russia and Ukraine cast a shadow over the Games. Fourteen days after the completion of the 24th Winter Olympic Games (and during the Winter Paralympic Games), Russia invaded Ukraine. In March 2022, it was reported that China directly appealed to Russia to not invade Ukraine until after the conclusion of the Beijing Games (Wong, E, and J. Barnes, 2022).

The intersection of politics and sport at the Olympics Games have a long history. Following the 1968 protests of American track sprinters, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, the IOC adopted Rule 50 to prevent “every kind of demonstration or propaganda, whether politica, religious or racial” (Pells, 2021). However, prior to the 2020 Tokyo Olympic, the IOC modified Rule 50 to allow athletes to make expressions that are consistent with the Olympic Principles and not specifically directed at a specific individual or country (Goh, 2022):



Raise political or social issues during press conferences and the Olympic village while also making their gestures on the field of play, the rule says, provided there is no disruption or disrespect to fellow competitors (Grohmann, 2022).

Despite the loosening of rules, at the 24th Winter Olympic Games, NOC hosting nation China issued the following statement, “any behavior or speeches that is against the Olympic spirit, especially against Chinese laws and regulations, are also subject to certain punishment” (Grohmann, 2022). The inconsistencies between the rules of the IOC and NOC China put the athletes in a difficult position if they were inclined to make a political statement.

The political climate of the 24th Winter Olympic Games influenced the researchers to include instruments in this study to examine how politics impacted the experience of the athletes. The study asked the athletes’ opinion on the role of politics at the Olympic Games. Figure 30 reveals their outlook:

**FIGURE 30: Experience Ratings of Politics**

ITEM	N	MEAN
The Olympic should be politically neutral	182	5.49
I experienced the Beijing 2022 games to be politically neutral	181	4.33
Olympic athletes should take neutral stance on political issues	182	4.68
I would take a political stance if there were no consequences	178	4.66

The top-box ratings by the athletes reveal the complexities of politics at the Olympics Games. See Figure 31 for the top-box ratings:

**FIGURE 31: Top-Box Ratings of Politics**

ITEM	Top-Box
The Olympic should be politically neutral	62%
I experienced the Beijing 2022 games to be politically neutral	31%
Olympic athletes should take neutral stance on political issues	41%
I would take a political stance if there were no consequences	39%

The findings from these statements present a complex interpretation by the athletes on the role of politics at the Olympic Games. When asked, “The Olympics should be politically neutral,” an overwhelming majority of the athletes agreed or strongly agreed with this statement (top-box of 62%). Yet, when asked “Olympic athletes should take neutral stance on political issues,” fewer athletes were willing to agree that they should not have the ability to take stances on political issues (top-box of 41%). These findings indicate a majority of athletes not only believe the Olympic Games should be politically neutral, but also have the flexibility to take stances on political issues.

The inconsistencies between these answers are further complicated when the athletes were asked, “I would take a political stance if there were no consequences.” Despite a desire for a neutral event and a desire to take political stances, only 39% of athletes agreed or strongly agreed with this last statement. The responses to these statements confirm that politics at the Olympic Games is complex, experienced at an individual level and challenges democratic norms around free-speech.

The embedded political nature of the Olympic Games were confirmed when the athletes responded to the statement, “I experienced the Beijing 2022 Games to be politically neutral.” Only 29% of the athletes agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, indicating that nearly 70% of all athletes experienced the games to be political in some manner. Athletes interviewed for this study were asked the following questions to provide clarity on the role of politics at the Olympic Games:

1. Do you think the Olympics should be politically neutral, why?
2. Do you think athletes should be allowed to take political stances?
3. Did the news of the threat of war between Russia and Ukraine impact the Games? You?

The following themes emerged from asking these questions. See Figure 32:

**FIGURE 32: Qualitative Codes- Politics**

CODE	DEFINITION
Politics (Neutral)	Athletes should remain neutral and refrain from sharing political beliefs/concerns during the Olympic Games
Politics (Partisan)	Athletes should have the ability to share political beliefs/concerns during the Olympic Games
War	How the threat of war did or did not impact the athlete's experience of the OGs

## Politics Neutral

When prompted with the questions on the role of politics at the Olympic Games, several of the athletes expressed a belief that athletes should seek to refrain from sharing their political concerns. The Olympic Games is an opportunity to create unity and share culture, whereas using the Games as a platform for political beliefs interferes with this mission.

*I'm a professional NOC athlete, so I think it's a really difficult question because when you do live in a country that is democratic, it's the freedom of opinion. It's really good if you can state your opinion. And I think athletes are role models. We should be promoting values and principles that align with our views and I should be spreading those things in our countries and in our statements, I should be allowed to do that even if they're somewhat political. I don't think you should be able to go out there with fun party symbols or something...[but] there are also countries competing at the games, [who] do not have that freedom of opinion, even though in theory, but like they could lose funding because of it. I think the best example that just comes to my head right now is Belarus, like in theory they could say something, it's not the media threat to their lives, but they're like not really allowed to say what they think. So if we allow that, then their country will force them to promote their values that they wouldn't really stand by and maybe they have to say something, it can be really dangerous for athletes. So I personally think that the Olympic Games should be about sports and it might be better if there's no direct politics involved. I think the ban is there for a reason and it's not harming the athletes necessarily in a way, but it could harm the athletes when it's not there.*

.....

Consultant: Do you think the Olympics should be politically neutral? And if yes or no, why?

*Athlete: Oh, that's a tough one. [I am] more leaning towards, yes, it should be politically neutral. I think if it just opened up then there would just be too much politics at the Olympics. Too many people with different issues and I think it would just overshadow the actual sporting event. So yeah, I'm leaning towards, yes, should be politically neutral.*

.....

*I think they should be politically neutral, but we have international law. So we have human rights. I don't know how many countries agreed with those human rights, I'm not a specialist in that, but then at least [the IOC] select countries to hold these games where we think that human rights are treated well or respected. I don't know if you can be 100% politically neutral because I think this is a political question too, but, I dunno, 100 countries agreed on human rights. They signed a contract. So yeah, we, we should follow that and [if] there is this question, in China, then we shouldn't go there. That's, at least my opinion. And should at least have the right to express themselves sometimes. But I can understand that there shouldn't be any political signs. Um, cause it, maybe sometimes it causes too much.*

.....

*I like the idea that the Olympics is completely neutral because then you have one ground where everybody can meet and without any restrictions. So I think everybody should be included and I think that could then further even pave the way for some political discussions that need to happen. I think that's also the point of view of the IOC. They want to bring the people together no matter usually what is happening.*

.....

## Politics Partisan

In other interviews, participants offered an opposing narrative: athletes should have the ability and right to express political views while competing at the Olympic Games. Several athletes believed the Games represented an opportunity to spread democratic values, especially freedom of speech and the promotion of democratic values broadly. Athletes also recognized the nuance of how this should occur at the Games was problematic and raised additional challenges.

Consultant: *Do you think athletes should be able to take a political stance?*

Athlete: *I think they should have the right to do so, but in my opinion you should not. Again, all things, if you're not in a country that, let's say you're [the IOC] not hosting in countries that don't fit the criteria, then I think there's less reason to protest the Olympic games. Or during the Olympic games, I think whatever, you know, local problems that are going on in the world that people might wanna protest. I think it gets messy if everyone wants to take some kind of stance. And I do think that for two weeks maybe we can come together and just ignore that stuff a little bit and just get along versus always having some kind of point to make.*

*As much as I think that it should stay neutral, I do think people should be able to protest or make a political statement if they want. I think ultimately that's an athlete's decision. I just think at the same time, I don't think everything someone protests has to be celebrated, if that makes sense. Like it can just be like, acknowledge they did. But then like if it was me and it was my teammates, I would probably tell 'em to just stop doing that for the next two weeks. That's just me. Not trying to hate on someone's freedom of expression, but I just think the whole thing is better when you can just see people can get along.*

*I think IOC walks a very difficult line in terms of wanting to broaden the understanding of culture. It's so amazing to have communist nations exposed to the westernized world and vice versa. So we can see more of the humanity and share that respect for each other. Sport is a fantastic way of doing that. So I'm in support of that a hundred percent. But they also award Olympics to places that are utilizing the Olympics to promote nationalism and war, aka Russia. And then China. They had currency manipulation goals and technology acquisition goals. They wanted to be I think the biggest technology manufacturer by 2025. So hosting the Olympics facilitated technology acquisition and the ability to manipulate currency from what I understand. Maybe I'm wrong, but economically gave them an influence. So to say that you can or cannot do something is irrelevant when something as massive as the Olympics [it is] inherently gonna have some sort of political effect. So I think they handled the situation with Ukraine really well. When my teammate stood up and said, "No War Ukraine." And they were like, "That's not political. That's promoting peace." That's awesome. I don't know when it comes to human rights and advocacy, the way to resolve the conflict of whether or not an athlete should use their platform to speak out for, for what they believe in.*

*I had experience training in Russia and basically a lot of the Russian facilities are paid by the state, so they're supported by the state. So then they tell [us] that politics has nothing to do with it, but at the same time they, all of those athletes are sponsored by the government and there is no other choice. If you're scared at a high level, you're sponsored by the government, you cannot choose whether you are or not. If you're an international team, you are sponsored by the government. So you do not really choose whether I want to be sponsored by them or not. Basically, if you compete internationally, you are sponsored by the government. And then we have, again, a great mix of politics in sports because on one hand you wanna do what you love, so it's your passion and you just want to perform in your sports. So yeah, it's a very controversial topic, but I feel for the athletes [Russian] and I'm very sorry for them. And it [banning from international competition] doesn't look like it's gonna stop tomorrow. So if this lasts for, I don't know, four, five years, for 10 years, it's gonna be a whole generation of people who will never get a chance of competing internationally.*

Consultant: Do you think athletes should be allowed to take any sort of political stances, when you're talking to the media or any other opportunities to express your values or something that they perceive as wrong?

Athlete: This is a tough one. I think it would be wrong to punish athletes for doing so, but I don't think, I don't think it should be encouraged.

Consultant: Is there a particular situation where you think it would be accepted?

Athlete: I'm thinking now [about] the Ukrainian skeleton athlete [who] called for peace and I think that's fine because he is just calling for peace, but if you're like calling out some leader or personally naming someone that can, I guess cause more harm than good. I think there needs to be a line but just calling for peace and or maybe trying to improve a certain area. Like if an African athlete was calling for more help with world hunger or something like that, I think that would be perfectly fine. But maybe if someone came out and was just dishing it out on Donald Trump or Biden or something like that, I think, that's kind of crossing the line.

.....

It would be for sure nice if the athletes have a bit more rights to express their views and use their platforms. A lot of athletes are role models and people look up to them. It would be nice if they could use the big platform of the IOC to express their values even if they're [a] critic or even if it's a critique to the hosting country or whatever. But in China it was really like, "Oh, you can't say anything about human rights or whatever." And I think that's really bad because as an athlete you can, I mean, it's a fact that China violates some human rights and I think as an athlete I should have the rights to actually say that when I'm there and not just like talk around it and say, "Oh, I don't know, human rights in general should be respected."

## War

The threat of war between Russia and Ukraine highlighted the power of the Olympic movement to create lasting connections between athletes of different countries. The athletes expressed their sympathy and compassion for Russian and Ukrainian athletes, and detailed what the fallout from war meant for their friendships and the ability of the athletes from the warring countries to maintain their sporting life.

I didn't find out until afterwards, but leading in, yes, my teammate, he's my teammate cause he's an Olympian, but like we work together a lot. He was a Ukrainian athlete competing in skeleton. And he left me a voicemail when he got home and he was in tears and he said he was terrified and that people were dying all around him and he didn't know what to do. And I got goosebumps. And that's when I connected him with Global Athlete and as many media folks as I could. I helped him write a letter because I felt like something should be done. And then [to] understand any animosity between China, Russia, and Ukraine that would exist during the para games. It broke my heart because the Olympic truce is something I believe in. And I understand that other nations may have broken the truce. Like I know that Israel and other countries fight constantly during, during the Olympics. But this was a moment when the Russians had been acutely aware of this truce because they hosted the Olympics two games ago before Korea. They were already under punishment. And I think it broke a lot of people's hearts around the world. So I, don't know anyone that wasn't impacted by it. I'm still feeling guilty because I have the luxury of being an American and being able to tune all those things out. But I know that they're still in it now and my friend is still struggling.

.....

*Russian athletes are now expelled from almost many sports, including my sport. So this season athletes representing the Russian Federation are not gonna be able to compete internationally, which first I think is a big shame for the athletes first and foremost because a lot of athletes in figure skating, are very young. So a lot of them are, I dunno, 17, 18, 20. So they in particular have nothing to do with the situation and I'm very sorry for them because I have friends among them and they are just basically, they don't know what they're training for. They have their own internal competition, but obviously that's never the same as world championships. So then the level of motivation drops and yeah, basically the thing which you're doing well, basically the goals you're having for your whole life, they're just canceling them.*

.....

*Athlete: It was really weird because we have many Ukrainians and Russians in aerals, and the athletes used to be pretty good friends and we know both sides quite well. So it is really, really awkward to see that whole thing happening. And even now it's, it's very yeah, it's, it's still a weird atmosphere. It didn't really impact the games itself because it pretty much unraveled like right afterwards. But the tension could be clearly felt.*

*Consultant: Did those athletes seek to build a bond or a bridge between another or they felt like they had to keep themselves because of that?*

*Athlete: I mean, I definitely know that the athletes of these countries were told, especially the Ukrainians to hold back on anything and not do anything. But we had the incident where after the competition Ilia Burov got third from Russia and Oleksandr Abramenko (Ukraine) got second and they hugged each other. So after it's a big deal and I'm sure it impacted them quite a bit.*

.....



This study revealed politics at the Olympic Games remains a precarious balance of the right to self-expression and the insulation of sport from the influence of political statements and pressures. The athletes described the Olympic Games as not only an opportunity to create unity and share culture, but was also a platform for sharing political (democratic) beliefs. These two purposes are often in conflict and athletes struggle with how to balance these divergent concepts when representing their home nations. This was acutely present when the athletes were asked to react to the war between Ukraine and Russia. The athletes' explained sport was simultaneously bringing individual athletes together, but putting a wedge between nations.

## DOPING

Entering the 24th Winter Olympic Games, doping in sport remained a key topic of discussion, particularly around the participation of Russian athletes under the banner of the Russian Olympic Committee flag (Keh, 2022). In 2019, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) banned Russia from participating in international sports competitions due to its complicity in a state-sponsored doping scheme at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. Despite this ban, athletes from Russia were allowed to participate in the 2022 Winter Games pending clean records from the sport federations that govern each sport and a willingness to not represent Russia.

During the 2022 Games it was revealed that Russian figure skating athlete Kamila Valieva tested positive for a banned substance at the Russian National Championships in December of 2021 (Longman, 2022). Valieva was a heavy individual medal favorite, and led Russia to the Gold medal in the team event earlier in the 2022 Games. The revelation that Valieva was competing at the Games under suspicion of doping put the Games and the sport under an extreme microscope (Goldman, 2022). The case called into question the role of doping in sport, state-sponsored doping and the role of ethics and fairness in sport.

To gain a greater understanding of the role of doping at the 24th Winter Olympic Games, the athletes were asked the following statements. See Figure 33.

**FIGURE 33: Experience Ratings of Doping**

ITEM	N	MEAN
Doping/drug testing control was effective	232	5.61
I was comfortable with doping/drug testing control procedures	232	5.69
There was doping at the 2022 Olympic Games	180	4.59
There was doping in my sport at the 2022 Olympic Games	178	3.52

The top-box ratings by the athletes provide insights into doping in sport and doping control at the Olympics Games. See Figure 34 for the top-box ratings:

**FIGURE 34: Top-Box Ratings of Doping**

ITEM	Top-Box
Doping/drug testing control was effective	53%
I was comfortable with doping/drug testing control procedures	51%
There was doping at the 2022 Olympic Games	29%
There was doping in my sport at the 2022 Olympic Games	21%

The athletes rated the testing process and procedures at 53% and 51% top-box respectively, suggesting reasonable confidence levels in the doping controls present at the Olympic Games. When asked about the presence of doping at the Olympic Games, the athletes reported a larger discrepancy between their experiences and beliefs. In response to “There was doping at the 2022 Olympic Games,” only 29% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Additionally, when rating the statement “There was doping in my sport at the 2022 Olympic Games,” 39% of the athletes strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement, suggesting that nearly 60% of the participants had some reservations about the role of doping at the Games within their sport. Athletes interviewed shed light on the clarity of this data. See Figure 35.

**FIGURE 35: Qualitative Codes- Doping**

CODE	DEFINITION
Doping (Issue)	Doping is prevalent at the OGs
Doping (Non-Issue)	Doping is not prevalent at the OGs
Doping (Solution)	Athlete outlook on how to curb doping

*Doping-Issue*

*I experienced it [doping] at the Olympics. They test me six days in a row at the Olympics and I'm like “come on, you took my blood twice in 12 hours. Is that necessary?” Like the first one hasn't even come back yet. And which is fine, but it's harassment. And there was no one there to look out for my rights. On top of that, when I started investigating the Sochi doping scandal, which was a scandal that I lost the [color] medal, to where they stripped it from the Russians. However, under Wanda's code 2.1, the strict liability laws would've applied to an individual because it was a nation. Somehow the court of arbitration argued against it applying to the individual athletes since it was the nation guilty of this. And I'm like, so basically the athletes don't get stripped of the medals, but the country still gets the medal total and the country is the one that's guilty.*





Well firstly I think if there is an organization called WADA, and if we're doing all of this [testing], then doping exists in sports, and if they're positive cases, I'm not talking only about my sport, but there are like constantly some positive cases, but there are people who are doping. So it would be very naive to say, "no, there is no doping." Because if there would be no doping, then we would have none of that [testing].

.....

Athlete: Well, in my sport, in figure skating, there was this very very famous piece about Valieva. I dunno if you heard about it...about the 15 year old girl who had a positive test from a competition. She didn't have a positive test at the Olympics, but she had one from the nationals, which was two months prior . And that was found out during the Olympics. The result came back during the Olympics and still she was allowed to compete because she was underage and she was a protected person. In my opinion, that should not have been the case because nobody profited from it because basically she was in the headlines everywhere. It was an enormous pressure on her. I think if she's not old enough to be responsible for what she's taking, she should not compete at the Senior Olympics.

Consultant: You're saying since she tested positive, she should not have competed?

Athlete: No, I don't think she should have, or it doesn't matter who's responsible for her. With all the athletes, you're responsible for what's in your body. If somebody gives me a chocolate bar, it's full of steroids, then that's my fault, right? I don't blame her. I don't think at 15 she made a decision to take the [drugs], or at least I hope she didn't. But I think that should be punished. It's not okay for the other 30 girls competing and knowing that she is not a clean athlete. If you have evidence for her not being a clean athlete, then she shouldn't compete at the highest competition in the world. I think that's kinda controversy with the rules which are made by WADA.

.....

Athlete: Yeah, I believe people [dope], I don't know if people took anything while they were in China, but I do believe people did things beforehand to prepare for, for the event in China.

Consultant: Specific to your sport skeleton?

Athlete: Yes.

Consultant: What's your outlook on that?

Athlete: So it's pretty well known a lot of people in our sport have been doping before, so it is unfortunate and I do see it as unfair, but at the same time I can kind of resign to the fact that the international governing body, either won't do anything harsh or can't do anything. So it's kind of just an acceptance now that it is gonna happen.

.....

Consultant: So broadly do you think there's doping at the Olympics? And then is there doping specific to your sport?

Athlete: So broadly? I would say absolutely. And then specific to my sport, I would say it's very unlikely. I would be very surprised. That's just due to the nature of our sport, it's very technical. I'm not sure how much of an advantage you would actually get.

.....

*I think even before the McLaren report, which was however many years ago now, I felt strongly that there was doping within the sport and then I think the McLaren report kind of reinforced that and then that's kind of the baseline. And to me not enough has changed within biathlon to convince me that it's not still a problem, at least for Russia. And I don't think Russia's the only doper either. I think I think they're really good at it. I think they have a lot of staff and doctors and stuff who probably work with other countries. But just over the years there's always some kind of story that comes out in cross country. And so in my opinion it's prevalent. Also there's always teams or individual athletes who, you know, their baseline ability at the World Cup level might be whatever, let's say 20th place, something like that. And then they go to major championships every year and suddenly they're insanely strong and then when the games' major championships is over, they go back to the baseline. You know, there's peaking and then there's perfectly peaking almost beyond what my gut tells me is possible and doing it consistently like every time there's a major championship. So it's just like those are kind of all the factors for me.*

.....

*Even at this last Olympics, there's one more example. This one's hard cuz she was so young with a figure skater who's caught with drugs. When you're really young, like under 18, it's really hard to say who's at fault. But I think in the end, the answer should be, well she's still doping, she has to be taken out. And then if she's a child then it's the coaches and the staff and the federation that pay that penalty. But you have to penalize someone, somehow. I think they kind of continuingly left it as "oh well it's technically her fault but she's young so we're not gonna penalize her." And then, you know, she's the athlete so we're not gonna penalize coaches who claim they didn't know and then like nothing happened.*

.....

### *Doping- Non-Issue*

*In our sports you don't really benefit from this, I dunno, short term, [maybe] muscle gain or anything like that. So yeah, I think at the games, more [doping], in general. I do believe that most of the athletes in our sport play clean.*

.....

*I don't really know what I should take to become a better athlete. So I don't think in curling doping is a big, big issue, to be honest. I can't speak for other sports. Um, but in my opinion, it's not a big, big deal in curling.*

.....



Doping at the Olympics is a constant for as long as the Games have existed and the 24th Olympic Games demonstrates this still remains the case. The athletes in this study shared that doping continues to be present at the Games, but its usage is highly sport specific. Additional research needs to be led to measure the prevalence of doping in each sport and how this impacts competition.



## PART IV – CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand how athletes experienced the 2022 Winter Olympic Games. The study examined: (1) athletes awareness of and perceptions of various Olympic Games attributes (competition formats, atmosphere, access to resources, training and competition environments, etc.); (2) the impact of Covid-19; (3) the awareness of and influence of the Olympic Principles; (4) political and social issues during the Olympic Games; and (5) the perception of performance enhancing drug use.

» This study found that the experiences of men and women athletes were mostly the same, but there were significant differences between how younger (Under 25) and older athletes (25 and older) experienced the games. Additional research is needed to examine why older and younger athletes experienced the Games differently or if this was a phenomenon experienced only at these Games. Some of the athletes highly rated their experiences at the Games, but even these athletes pointed to how Covid-19, the quality of the food, and the socialization restrictions among other factors muted certain aspects of their experience. Research that examines the resilience of athletes and how this character trait influences an athlete's experience can shape how the IOC supports athletes during an Olympic Games.

- The IOC should establish a comprehensive athlete experience assessment tool to benchmark athletes' experiences across Olympic Games. Measuring the athlete experience will provide the IOC clear metrics on how it can improve its support of athletes and establish continuity between games despite differences in NOC hosts.

- The difference of experience between younger athletes and older athletes warrants further exploration. Additional resources and education may be needed to support athletes and the IOC's ability to deliver the Olympic mission.
- The IOC should form an athlete-led committee to review the differences in experiences of athletes of varying age, gender, and other demographic groups considered relevant. This action would reaffirm the IOC's commitment to its Olympic Principles of good governance, putting athletes at the heart of the Games, and unity in diversity.



The findings from this study indicated the experiences of athletes were heavily impacted by the presence of Covid-19. This phenomenon modified the normal routines of the athletes – how they practiced, competed, traveled, interacted with other athletes among other significant factors. Additionally, Covid-19 created an environment where athletes were highly stressed and subjected to challenging safety protocols that disrupted their day to day lives. For the athletes who tested positive for Covid-19 during the Games, few had a positive experience, and most struggled with their mental health and ability to stay in peak athletic form.

- The IOC needs to place a premium on supporting athlete well-being, specifically mental health. The isolation restrictions placed upon athletes who tested positive for Covid-19 revealed the inadequacies to support athletes' mental wellbeing.
- The Covid-19 phenomenon revealed that sport can be safely hosted despite a global pandemic. NOC China successfully hosted an Olympic Games, but there were several logistical challenges that athletes faced, namely; transportation, social distancing, and testing. The IOC should conduct a retrospective study to examine which protocols were necessary and which were obtuse – this will provide critical data to inform best practices should the sporting community face another catastrophic phenomenon that prevents normal behavior.



The IOC adopted a series of Principles that guides its intent and actions for the Olympic movement – working principles, missions, values, and vision, all of which seek to build a better world through sport. This study examined how well the IOC delivered on its Principles and if the Principles modified the athletes' experiences during the Winter Games. This study found younger athletes displayed relatively greater optimism towards the IOC Principles, but across both age groups none of the Principles were rated especially high on average. Most concerning, the athletes rated The IOC built a better world through sport at the 2022 Olympic Games, the ultimate goal of the IOC's Olympic Principles, as the lowest guiding Principle (Top-Box 33%). The IOC will need to examine why it is falling short and how it can best achieve its Olympic Principles.

- The gap between the IOC's Principles and the athletes' perception of them may be due to the conversion of the intangible ideas of Olympic Principles into tangible action during the Games. For example, athletes expressed concern over the seriousness of the IOC's pursuit of sustainable Games, citing the waste created during the Games and the failure to use Olympic venues for future competitions. Work is needed to distill the Principles into meaningful action that connects lofty ideas to practical action.
- The IOC should form an athlete-led committee to review the Olympic Principles to examine why the IOC is falling short of delivering on these goals and what steps need to be taken to build a better world through sport.
- The IOC should educate athletes on its Olympic Principles and how the IOC plans on implementing them. Sharing this information will not only help athletes understand the importance of these priorities, but also the challenges the IOC faces to accomplish them. Encouraging this dialogue can hold the IOC accountable, increase transparency, and provide rapid feedback on their efforts.



During and after the Olympic Games the role of politics in sports dominated the news headlines. Specifically, the threat of war between Russia and Ukraine cast a long shadow over the Games. This study examined how politics broadly impacted the experiences of athletes at the Games and their opinion on the role of politics. The findings revealed the athletes' perceptions of politics at the Olympic Games to be in conflict. A majority of the athletes shared that the Olympic Games should be a neutral event, but simultaneously believe they have a right to take political stances. This inherent conflict elevates the importance of the IOC to provide guidance to Olympic athletes during the Games.

- The IOC should work with key stakeholders to reexamine its stance on [Rule 50](#), and how it provides guidance to athletes. The conflict between neutrality and free speech will continue unless the IOC can provide better guidance on its stances as an organization and how athletes should use their own voices.
- The IOC should lead a recommitment by participating nations to abstain from violence during the Olympic Games and reaffirm the power of sport to unite, spread shared values and the recognition and appreciation of differences.



Doping at the Olympic Games has been a constant for as long as the Games have existed. The 24th Olympic Games were no exception, as they came under scrutiny by the world's media when it was revealed that Russian figure skating athlete Kamila Valieva tested positive for a banned substance prior to the Games. This became problematic because she had already competed in the Games, helping the Russian Olympic Team win gold in the team competition. The prevalence of doping at the Games influenced the researchers to ask the athletes a series of questions to explore the role of doping at the 24th Winter Olympic Games. Many athletes believed that doping was present at the Games (nearly 40% of athletes in the sample at least somewhat agree), but its usage was highly sport specific.

- The data from this study supports doping may be problematic for specific sports. The IOC should collect additional data by sport to gauge athlete perception of drug use. Identifying the sports that are perceived to have higher rates of doping would help the IOC effectively concentrate how it deploys resources related to education, prevention, and testing.
- The figure skating doping scandal during the 24th Games revealed the IOC lacks important protocols when an athlete tests positive during an Olympic Games. When Russian Olympic Committee athlete Valieva tested positive, it was unclear if she should be able to continue to compete and what should happen to her previous results. One year removed from the Games, the IOC and the international drug testing community still have not resolved this case, meaning athletes from other countries still have not received their medals (Brennan, 2023). Considerable policy change is needed to build the credibility of the IOC's enforcement mechanisms (testing processes, judicial mediation) and even the competitions themselves.



## PART V – CITATIONS

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# NOTES

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This report was researched, designed and prepared by IntelliSport Analytics. IntelliSport Analytics is an organizational change research and consulting firm partnering with sports leaders. IntelliSport uses mixed-methods data analytics to provide sports industry leaders with information they need to make informed organizational decisions. IntelliSport unlocks insights that drive highly functioning and data-informed organizations and teams.

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