

# Influence of Policies on Professional Sports in the Run-up to the Olympics 2022 in Beijing

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**Abstract:** *The article deals with the research of influence of policies on professional sport, particularly with interfering of policies in the Olympics based on the example of decisions made by the World Anti-Doping Agency towards western sportsmen who were diagnosed with asthma.*

**Keywords:** foreign-policy image, the Olympics, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), asthmatics, doping, influence, sport, policy.

In the current context, many countries of the world pay a great attention to the formation of positive foreign-policy image on the international stage, and the professional sport serves as one of the key instruments in it. Herewith, the presentation of every country in different sport competitions is certainly of great importance. The higher the level of competitions, the better the result for the image of state. The Olympics is one of the important events for each country, which takes participation in it, because the amount of won golden medals during the competitions is promoted as an advantage of one or another social and political system. Herewith, the Olympics perform a number of social functions, such as uniting of people, enhance of popularity of going on for sports, and increasing of patriotic senses. Acting under the flag of your country is a kind of show of senses of sportsmen towards their homeland. Thus, the stronger the senses and the better the results, the more support they get from their country and community.

However, nowadays the principle of the Olympic charter, which states “sport is out of policies”, is followed increasingly rare. Every state acts solely according to their interests and try to maximize the benefits that could be derived from the Olympics. As the influence of sport achievements on the international image of countries grows, the attempts to call them to question are made more often, and the politicization of sports becomes an effective tool of its discredit. The motto by Pierre de Coubertin, which states “O Sport, you are Peace!”, is forgotten long ago, and the sport movement has turned today into a venue for settling political scores and the largest commercial project.

Nowadays the professional sport is considered to be an opportunity of getting of huge benefits and image dividends. “Good guys” are encouraged, they are forgiven for use of narcotic drugs and political permissiveness, while “bad guys” from unwelcome states are punished and presented as a sort of corrupted criminals. The World Anti-Doping Agency plays a particular role in it, implementing a huge number of rules and exceptions that are not known and understandable to everyone.

Let us consider this aspect in details based on the example of national Ski and Biathlon team of Norway, which individual representatives plan to participate the XXIV Winter Olympic Games in Beijing.

It is well known that the most of medals in ski during the Olympics is won by asthmatics; according to statistics presented in Verdens Gang, the largest tabloid of Norway, skiers who had the diagnosis of asthma won about 70 percent of Norwegian medals from 1993 to 2016<sup>1</sup>. In particular, Norwegian athletes who suffered from asthma won more than 15 percent of medals during the Olympics-2002 in Salt Lake City. Afterwards, WADA prohibited using anti-asthmatic drugs without any therapeutic prescription. However, salbutamol, which is on the WADA list of prohibited substances and methods, was allowed to use in small doses just by medical prescription in 2012 due to multiple requests to such medications.

WADA caused with its contentious decisions a burst of resentment from sport functionaries. In particular, the Polish skier Justyna Kowalczyk reported in her comment towards the high-profile case of Sundby the following: “The strongest skier of the world Martin Johnsrud Sundby got caught using the dose of salbutamol, which is ten times more than allowed in concentration. He just overdone the dose of his asthma medications. It was eighteen months ago. And we find out it only now, after the verdict of Sports Arbitration Court has been reached”<sup>2</sup>.

Marit Bjørgen was the main competitor of Kowalczyk that time. The Norwegian skier became almost invincible and won all of her six golden medals after the Norwegian sports physicians had declared that she had had a hard form of asthma. On this basis, they permitted her to use Symbicort, the medication that contained the prohibited salbutamol. That is why Justyna Kowalczyk said during the Olympic Games 2010 in Vancouver the following words, which sound surprisingly typically even nowadays: “The Norwegians talk a lot regarding to the theme of doping in Russia. Doping is bad; it does not have to be. However, would not it be better to have a look at yourself? The Norwegians take doping themselves, but as a medication. The difference is in the fact that some athletes have this

1 <https://www.vg.no/sport/langrenn/i/ldRlo/69-present-av-norske-ol-medaljer-er-tatt-av-loepere-med-astma-medisin>

2 <https://www.vg.no/sport/i/EG8jK/loefshus-slaar-tilbake-mot-kritikk-det-er-kowalczyk-i-et-noetteskall>

permission, while the other ones have not. Bjørgen would never reach her results without the prescribed drugs<sup>3</sup>.

At the same time, even the Norwegian sports physicians made no secret that the miraculous transformation of Bjørgen into a Ski queen was connected to her anti-asthmatic drugs. According to the words of Hans Petter Stokke, who was the sports physician of the Norwegian national team, "This new medication extends the respiratory tract. Marit gets more oxygen, and it gets a direct impact on her muscles, they become stronger"<sup>4</sup>.

Thus, nowadays it is not a secret anymore that the acting athletes from Norway use medications for bronchial tubes expansion. Notably, many of them plan to participate the Olympic Games 2022 in Beijing, among them are such sportsmen as Maiken Caspersen Falla, Therese Johaug, Heidi Weng, Ragnhild Haga, Johannes Klæbo, Eric Valnes, Pål Golberg, Simen Hegstad Krüger, and others<sup>5</sup>.

However, the problem is still unsolved, as salbutamol that is presented in medical kit of Norwegian national team is recognized as doping by WADA in all of its classifiers.

Norwegian sports physicians provided official medical report, under which many members of their national team suffer from chronic asthma. Moreover, practically all the generations of sportsmen of this country have this diagnosis. This is the cause they use the medication, which oxygenate the blood and increase the stamina. Meanwhile, the higher doses even cause the effect comparable to using of anabolic steroids, i.e. increase of muscle mass and fat burning.

So why is the use of prohibited medications allowed to Norwegian athletes? Norwegian sports physicians insist on non-disclosure of this information, referring to medical confidentiality. All the documents are issued behind the scenes, the public finds out about it only when there is no any other alternative. It is quite simple, because Norwegians and other Scandinavians possess all the key positions within the International Ski Federation and the International Biathlon Union. As a result, all the doping scandals in these sports regard to Russians, Finns, Germans, but not to the people who suffer from hard asthma.

Norwegian athletes won nine of the twelve golden medals after the Ski World Cup 2021 in Oberstdorf, having earned the same amount of silver and bronze ones. The world public connected this dominance of Norwegian national team to the fact that many sportsmen have Therapeutic Use Exemption (TUE). This case caused WADA to make a formal statement regarding this theme: "Performing of professional duties of an athlete means subjection to loads which demand a significant level of stamina, that is why some of them suffer from asthma due to great intensity of

lungs ventilation. In addition, exposure to cool air or chlorine may also have a negative impact. You can find our data regarding to the tests including the data regarding to asthma medications in the following report<sup>6</sup>. Taking of inhaled asthma medications such as salbutamol in therapeutic dosage is not prohibited. However, it is prohibited to take this medication per os. Note also that in case of taking of inhaled medications through nebulizer, athletes often exceed the permissible dose. In emergency case, physicians may prescribe any of medications noted in the WADA list of prohibited substances and methods<sup>7</sup>. However, in this case it is necessary to meet condition, upon which the case of every individual athlete must meet the providing criteria of the Therapeutic Use Exemption for the mentioned substances or methods<sup>8</sup>.

Thus, WADA had to recognize the issuing authorizations for use of potent substances after doping test results of some American athletes had become publicly available. All of them were permitted to use prohibited medications by WADA on the base of Therapeutic Use Exemption, i.e. in fact, they "obtained a license" to use doping. This situation is particularly outrageous in cases of tennis players sisters Williams and Olympic champions gymnast Simone Biles and basketball player Elena Delle Donne, who took medications contained drugs<sup>9</sup>. In doing so, WADA recognizes that there are cases when different diseases or pathological conditions of athletes demand certain medication taking. An athlete can get TUE by proving the following:

- The medication is necessary for treatment of emergency or chronic conditions;
- The medication will not give any additional sporting advantages;
- There is not any alternative to this medication;
- Need in medication is not caused by previous taking of prohibited substances.

Based on this decision made by WADA, many Norwegian athletes continue to use their TUE and are not afraid to take medications, which are prohibited for the sportsmen of the whole world, under the pretext of treatment of diseases, first of all, of asthma.

At the same time, neither WADA, nor Norwegian federation has still released data concerning real amount of asthmatics in the national team of Norway and amount of athletes with TUE. This could make the situation much more clear, because this topic was widely discussed since 90's and especially since 00's when Justyna Kowalczyk rose this issue on a regular basis.

Therefore, the question regarding to athletes using medications prohibited for the rest of the sporting world is still on top in the run-up to the Olympics 2022 in Beijing. Do the new stars of Norwegian national team Therese

3 <https://www.sport.pl/zimowe/7,79225,7595827,vancouver-2010-echa-wypowiedzi-justyny-kowalczyk-ciszej-nad.html>

4 <https://www.vg.no/sport/langrenn/i/mJogl/astma-en-sykdom-som-har-oedelagt-mye-for-mange-oddvar-braa-jeg-ble-en-slags-provekanin>

5 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norway\\_at\\_the\\_2022\\_Winter\\_Olympics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norway_at_the_2022_Winter_Olympics)

6 <https://www.wada-ama.org/en/resources/anti-doping-stats/anti-doping-testing-figures-report>

7 <https://www.wada-ama.org/en/prohibited-list>

8 <https://www.wada-ama.org/en/what-we-do/science-medical/therapy-use-exemptions>

9 <https://twitter.com/hashtag/OpOlympics?src=hash>

Johaug and Johannes Klæbo have TUE? Their results had so increased just before the Olympics.

However, stars of summer sports suffered from asthma as well. For example, athlete Jackie Joyner-Kersey, tennis player Justine Henin, swimmer Matthew Dunn and football player Paul Scholes used inhalers during their sports performances. Sprinter Kim Collins, cyclist Alessandro Petacchi, and tennis player Filippo Volandri were caught taking salbutamol in 2002, 2007 and 2009 respectively. All of them either escaped punishment, or walked away with minimal suspension. Swimmer Ryan Lochte and athlete Alex Schwazer had TUE. There was a scandal regarding salbutamol taking by cyclist Chris Froome in 2017, but he was justified as well.

Thus, all that is happening is a blatant case of sport politicization and application of double standards towards the athletes from unwelcome states, because double standards are used openly every time in cases of revealing the facts of taking prohibited substances by European or American athletes. In this regard, there is a real threat of transformation of present WADA into a pliant tool of Western foreign policy players and a bargaining chip within political scrum, which could be used against any of dissenting countries. This means loss of credibility to the results of competitions, loss of interest to the Olympic Games, and increasing of frustration of the affected states. Such a course of events must not be allowed, otherwise, the current process of sport politicization will inevitably lead to the collapse of the Olympic movement, and there will be no winners in this game.