

***“I do not approve of the participation of women in public competitions. In the Olympic Games, their primary role should be to crown the victors.”*** (Baron Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympics)

***‘De Coubertin himself remained a lifelong and vociferous opponent of women’s participation.’*** (Women’s Sport Foundation)

***“Our ultimate goal must be 50-50 participation”*** (IOC President Jacques Rogge)

The quotes above illustrate the many twists and turns in the controversial history of female participation in the Olympic Movement. This case study considers female participation in the Olympics as athletes, leaders and volunteers and also considers issues associated with gender identity and female doping.

### ***Female Participation in the London Olympiads***

#### ***London 1908***

When London first hosted the Olympics in 1908, only 37 female athletes competed in the Games, a tiny number when compared to the 1,971 male athletes that competed. At the time, women faced significant barriers to participation in Olympic competition, and, as a result, Frenchwoman Alice Milliat organised a separate Women’s Olympic Games in 1922. The threat of an all-female movement caused the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to

relent and offer greater facilitation for females that wished to compete in Olympic competition.



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#### ***London 1948***

By London 1948, 390 female athletes had entered the Games, competing alongside 3,714 men.

#### ***London 2012***

The Executive Board (EB) of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) recently approved several new events for inclusion in the 2012 London Olympic Summer Games. Notably, women’s boxing has been included for the first time.

The inclusion of women’s boxing is undoubtedly a historic move towards Olympic gender equality. However, the WSF believe that it is unlikely that the Olympic Movement will achieve Rogge’s earlier quoted goal of 50-50 participation by 2012, given that the Beijing 2008 Games included 1,704 more male than female athletes, and 38 more male than female sports events/classes.

### ***Female Participation in the Paralympic Games***

When Paralympic sport was introduced in England, in 1948, it was primarily geared

towards ex-servicemen injured in the conflicts of World War II. Owing to the nature of its inception, one might reasonably understand the notable disparity in male-female at that time. However, 60 years later, the 2008 Beijing Games still demonstrates a dominance of male athletic participation of almost 2:1, suggesting that gender inequality remains a significant issue.

### ***The Role of National Olympic Committees***

National Olympic Committees (NOCs) are responsible for governing the selection and development of the teams that represent their nation in the Olympic and Paralympic Games.



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NOC's vary markedly in the levels of female representation amongst their squads. Whilst many nations (such as Team GB) field many female athletes, Saudi Arabia has yet to send any female athletes to the Games.

The Women's Sports Foundation believe that the Olympic Movement should be doing more to ensure that NOC's exercise gender equality in their selection of female athletes and

believe that such a conceit should be extended to cover all female participants in the Games, whether athletes, coaches, legislators or volunteers. Specifically, the WSF recently voiced concern over the representation of female hostesses (volunteers) in Beijing, stating that Chinese hostesses '*were chosen on their looks, and were trained for the role by standing in five inch high-heels while balancing books on their heads with a sheet of paper between their knees.*' The WSF have subsequently urged LOCOG (the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games) to ensure that London's volunteers communicate a positive and appropriate image that adequately represents the diverse nature of the British female population.

### ***Recent Inclusion of New Women's Sports***

Recent additions to the Olympic schedule of women's events, approved by the Executive Board (EB) of the IOC, include the following:

#### ***Women's Boxing***

The EB agreed to the introduction of three women's boxing events. The current model of 11 male boxing events will be replaced by 10 male and 3 female events. This constitutes not only an introduction of women into the sport onto the Olympic programme, but a welcome expansion of the entire sport on the Olympic stage. The total number of boxers allowed to enter the events, however, will remain unchanged.

The EC's decision to include women's boxing constituted recognition of the substantial

progress that the sport had achieved in recent years in both universality and technical quality (the sport was last proposed-unsuccessfully-as an addition to the Olympic programme in 2005).

### ***Canoe Sprint***

The EB agreed to the request made by the International Canoe Federation (ICF) for the replacement of the men's C2 500m event with the women's K1 200m event.

#### **800m athletic controversy**

Controversy first reared its head in the aftermath of the 800m athletics event, where many participants collapsed after crossing the finish line. The event was subsequently banned and not reintroduced until 1960.

### ***Wrestling, Swimming, Cycling***

The three Federations governing wrestling, swimming and cycling (FILA, FINA, and UCI respectively) submitted requests for new events, which were all accepted by the EB on condition that any new events leads to an increase in participation of women at the Games, and on the condition that these events replace existing events already attributed to these sports, whilst maintaining the same number of athletic participants within the respective sports.

### ***How New Sports are Considered***

The IOC received requests from 17 different International Sports Federations (ISF's) for modifications of events, quotas and competition formats for the London 2012 Olympic Games. The IOC Olympic Programme Commission based their decisions on key

established criteria, including considerations of whether any proposed modifications would increase universality, **gender equity** and youth appeal.

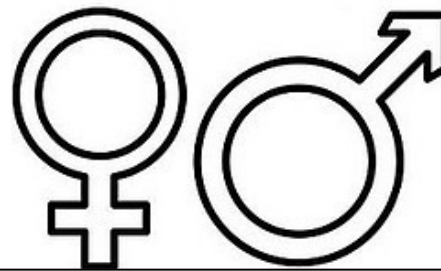


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### ***Gender Verification of Female Athletes***

One of the earliest cases of gender controversy centred around the German high-jumper Dora Ratjen. Following successful participation in the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games and the 1938 European Championships, Ratjen was found to be a man. The athlete later claimed that he had been forced to disguise himself as a female by the Nazi government.

Gender verification was first introduced in the Olympic Games. The purpose of gender verification was to confirm the gender of an athlete in cases where gender of an athlete might be disputed.

The first athlete to be caught cheating as a result of gender verification testing was Polish 4 x 100m Gold-medal winner runner Ewa Klobukowska,, in 1964 (Tokyo Games).

The use of gender verification has proved controversial, with some scholars (see '[Find](#)

Out More') voicing concern that genuine sex-impostors have not, to date, been uncovered by laboratory-based genetic testing, but that the tests had resulted in substantial harm being meted out to a number of female athletes who had been born with relatively rare genetic abnormalities. These scholars further stated that athletes who possess sex-related genetic abnormalities (notably 5-alpha-steroid-reductase deficiency, partial or complete androgen insensitivity, and chromosomal mosaicism) and who have been raised as females possess no unfair physical advantage, and should therefore not be excluded from their sport. A number of athletes with AIS (Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome, a condition associated with production of unusually high levels of testosterone production) and similar intersex conditions have, in fact, competed in Olympic competition. For example, seven genetically male athletes with AIS were allowed to compete as women in the 1996 Atlanta Games.

### ***Caster Semenya***

The most recent gender verification in sport controversy surrounded South-African sprinter Caster Semenya. Speculation quickly gathered around the athlete after Semenya came to the world's attention after her impressive victory in both the 2008 African Junior Championships and in the 800m event at the World Championships in Berlin, where she smashed the current world record by an amazing 2 seconds. These impressive times, combined with what some observers viewed

as a masculine appearance, led the IAAF to request gender verification tests.

The South African Sports Ministry stood decisively and vociferously behind their athlete, South African Sport and Recreation Minister Makhenkesi Stofile commented that he was "*shocked and disgusted*" at the treatment that 18 year old Semenya had experienced at the hands of the international media and the IAAF, also insisting that, if Semenya was ruled ineligible for further competition by the IAAF, "*it will be a third world war.*"

The IAAF subsequently announced that they would allow Caster Semenya to retain her World Athletics Championships title and prize money. When asked by South African magazine *You* about the controversy, she reportedly said: "*I see it all as a joke, it doesn't upset me. God made me the way I am and I accept myself. I am who I am and I'm proud of myself.*"

### ***IOC Promotion of Women in Olympic Sport***

The Beijing Olympic Summer Games marked a significant move towards gender parity in sport, with women constituting 42% of all athletes competing in the Games. We have already observed that the IOC makes attempts to increase the number of female athletic competitors in the Games by introducing new sports (such as women's boxing). The IOC has also developed initiatives to improve the gender parity within all areas of sport. An example is the annual Women & Sport Awards

honour women that have made an outstanding contribution to sport.

The most recent 2009 Women & Sport Awards were held on International Women's Day, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2009. The need for female role models in sport was recognised clearly by Jacques Rogge, President of the IOC, who commented that: *"I am pleased to publicly pay tribute to five remarkable women who, through their commitment, enthusiasm, drive and courage, have helped increase the number of women taking part in sport at all levels, both on and off the field."*

The five winners represented the fields of competitive sport, philanthropy, politics and academia and are briefly introduced here:

Burundian **Lydia Nsekera**, formerly a high jumper and basketball player, achieved the notable feat of becoming the first female president of a national football federation in Africa. **María Caridad Colón Ruenes**, a former Olympic Gold medal javelin thrower, was the first Cuban woman to win an Olympic gold medal (1980 Moscow Games) and now promotes national, Pan-American and international sport, via her role as the Chairperson of the NOC's Women and Sport Commission, the IAAF Women's Committee and the PASO Women and Sport Commission.

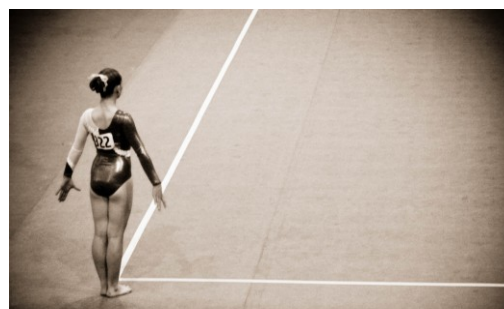


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**Arvin Dashjamts** is the Chairperson of Mongolia's Women and Sport Commission, and the only female member of the Mongolian NOC Executive Committee. Croatian **Danira Nakic Bilic**, a former silver medallist in basketball (Seoul, 1988) is a member of the NOC's Women in Sport Commission and plays a pivotal role in the development of both Olympic schools programmes and sports administration programmes. **Auvita Rapilla**, Deputy Secretary General of the Papua New Guinea Sports Federation and Olympic Committee, and member of the Oceania Women and Sport body, has been honoured by the IOC for her role in the development of women's sport in the region.

#### ***42% female participation in Beijing***

Out of the total 11,196 athletes that competed at the Beijing Olympics, 4,746 were women, meaning that a record 42% of all athletes participating in the Games were female. Additionally, 63 of the flag-bearers that led their national delegations into the Olympic Stadium during the Opening Ceremony were female. This represents a steady rise in gender parity (based on participation), when compared to the overall

38% participation figure of female athletes at the Sydney 2000 Games. It will certainly be interesting how this figure might change by the time the London 2012 Games arrive at our shores.

### ***Female Doping in the Olympic Games***

The most high-profile female drug cheat in the history of the Olympic Games is often cited as Marion Jones. Former winner of five Olympic medals (three gold and two Bronze) at the Sydney Olympics in 2000, Jones appeared to have a glittering athletic career ahead of her. But her involvement in the BALCO scandal and her associations with the infamous Victor Conte led to her eventual admission of her use of performance enhancing drugs. A court case followed, and the IOC subsequently stripped her of her Olympic medals. In accordance with this ruling, the IAAF wiped out all her records from Sept 1, 2000.

Female athletes testing positive for drugs in the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games can be confirmed as Greece's 2004 Athens Games 20km walk champion Athanasia Tsoumeleka, Croatian 800 m runner Vanja Perisic, and Ukrainian heptathlete Lyudmila Blonska. Additional recent examples taken from the 2004 Athens Games are as follows:

Myanmar's Nan Aye Khine tested positive for steroids and was subsequently disqualified after finishing 4<sup>th</sup> in the women's 48 kg weightlifting event;

Wafa Ammouri of Morocco withdrew from the Women's 63 kg weightlifting event at the last moment, citing a shoulder injury (it later transpired that she had tested positive for steroids in a pre-competition test).

Turkish weightlifter Sule Sahbaz tested positive for steroids a day before the Women's 75+kg weightlifting event.

Indian female weightlifter Pratima Kumari was banned from the 63-kilogram weightlifting competition after testing positive for excess testosterone. Her teammate, Sanamacha Chanu, was stripped of her fourth place finish in the 53-kilogram weightlifting competition after testing positive for furosemide.

Uzbekistan shot-putter Olga Shchukina tested positive in an out-of-competition screening for the steroid clenbuterol.

Ukraine was stripped of its Women's quadruple sculls Bronze medal after athlete Olena Olefirenko tested positive for Ethamivan.

Russian shot putter Irina Korzhanenko was stripped of her Gold medal after testing positive for stanozolol.

Ukrainian heptathlete Liudmyla Blonska was stripped of her Silver medal after failing a drugs test; she was subsequently banned for life as she had previously tested positive for stanozolol in 2003.



Greek sprinter Ekaterini Thanou withdrew from the competition on the basis of their failure to take a mandatory drug test before the Games began.

### ***The IOC World Conference on Women and Sport***

This Conference exists to promote women and sport within the IOC. Most recently, the 4th IOC World Conference on Women and Sport was held in Jordan in 2008. More than 600 participants from 116 different countries, unanimously agreeing upon five specific developmental themes: i) to seize upcoming opportunities to promote gender equality; ii) Governance; iii) Empowerment through education and development; iv) Women, sport and the media; and v) Women, sport and the Millennium Development Goals.

### ***FIND OUT MORE***

WSFF Viewpoint – Women and the Olympics (Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation):  
[http://www.wsff.org.uk/documents/Women\\_and\\_the\\_Olympics.pdf](http://www.wsff.org.uk/documents/Women_and_the_Olympics.pdf)

### **South Africa Slams Semenya's Gender Test.**

Eben Harrell, Friday, Sep.11, 2009.

<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1921847,00.html#ixzz0ZsmdFeV6>

### **Gender verification of female Olympic athletes.**

(Dickinson, BD, Genel, M, Robinowitz CB, Turner PL, Woods GL). Med Sci Sports Exerc. 2002 Oct;34(10):1539-42; discussion 1543.  
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12370551>

### ***CREDITS***

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