

# **ANALYZING MANAGEMENT BACKGROUND AND BOARD COMPOSITION IN RUSSIAN OLYMPIC SPORT FEDERATIONS' GOVERNING BOARDS**

Sergei Altukhov,<sup>1</sup> Tamara Dolmatova,<sup>2</sup> Peter Smolianov<sup>3</sup>

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Dramatic changes to the Russian political system and national administrative regulations following the collapse of the USSR in 1991 has had significant implications for the sport governance in the country. These national developments have coincided with sport becoming one of the most popular, politicized, and globalized socio-economic activities in the world. The transition to new forms of sport governance in Russia has been rather chaotic. The supreme executive body in Russian sport (committee, ministry, agency) has changed its name, form, and head 16 times between 1991 and 2012.<sup>4</sup>

In the Soviet system, sport federations were structural subdivisions of the USSR State Committee for Physical Culture and Sports. Now, sport federations in Russia have become public organizations and have acquired legal and financial independence.<sup>5</sup> In addition, all Russian national sport federations were recognized as part of international and regional sport federations and associations. Development of organizational structures have been driven by the type of sport, its popularity, commercial attractiveness, and the standards of international federations.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Institute of Sports Management and Law, HSE University, Russia.

<sup>2</sup> Federal Science Center of Physical Culture and Sport (VNIIFK), Russia.

<sup>3</sup> Sport and Movement Science Department, Salem State University, United States of America.

<sup>4</sup> A.P Dushanin, *About System of Sport Governance in Russian Federation*, PRESENTATION AT THE MINISTRY OF THE PUBLIC COUNCIL OF THE SPORT MINISTRY OF RUSSIAN FEDERATION (2019).

<sup>5</sup> Victor Timchenko, Kseniia Kaisheva & Vladimir Timchenko, *The Russian sport industry*, in *SPORT BUSINESS IN LEADING ECONOMIES* 239–276 (James Jianhui Zhang, Roger Haiyan Huang, & John Nauright eds., 2017).

<sup>6</sup> V.V. GALKIN, *ECONOMY AND GOVERNANCE IN PHYSICAL CULTURE AND SPORT* (2006).

The monopoly status of national sport federations (NSFs) and their influence in the sporting community has had a significant impact on the growing interest of government officials, businesspeople, and public figures in the activities of sport federations. These organizations became holders of exclusive rights in all sports - organizing championships and competitions in Russia, forming the composition of national teams to participate in international competitions, commercial rights, television rights, and the right to bid for mega-events. Consequently, new governance and managerial relations between sport entities and stakeholders have emerged, as well as new forms of laws and regulations for the country's increasingly capitalistic sport industry.<sup>7</sup>

The purpose of the study is to identify the patterns and factors of success in NSFs by studying the governance structure and board composition of summer Olympic sports federations in Russia. Further, this study investigates the relationship between board composition and NSF success, measured in terms of medal success. This study is part of a broader research project examining board composition in NSFs around the world.<sup>8</sup>

The relevance of this study is reinforced by the drug crisis which occurred in Russian sport in 2015 and its consequences. High-profile stories and scandals in which Russian athletes and officials have been involved and accused started after Sochi winter Olympics in 2014. Mutual accusations and misunderstandings have resulted in Russian national teams and officials being disqualified from participating in international sporting events until December 16, 2022 by a decision of the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Lausanne.<sup>9</sup> These facts indicate the malfunction of the existing model of sport management in Russia, the decentralization of sports policy provisions and public administration, and the lack of balance between the interests of state, business, and society in Russian sport.

---

<sup>7</sup> Vassil Girginov, Peter Smolianov & Tamara Dolmatova, *Multi-Level Leadership in Russian Elite Sport*, in EMBEDDED MULTI-LEVEL LEADERSHIP IN ELITE SPORT 63–80 (Svein S. Andersen, Per Øystein Hansen, & Barrie Houlihan eds., 1 ed. 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Joshua McLeod, Shaun Star & David Shilbury, *Board composition in national sport federations: a cross-country comparative analysis of diversity and board size*, MANAGING SPORT AND LEISURE (2021). DOI: 10.1080/23750472.2021.1970614

<sup>9</sup> Coralie Febvre, *Russia banned for two years in Landmark CAS Ruling*, THE MOSCOW TIMES (Dec. 17, 2020), <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/12/17/russia-banned-for-two-years-in-landmark-cas-ruling-a72399>

## 2. GOVERNANCE ISSUES IN RUSSIAN SPORT

The emergence of countries with planned economies has further reinforced the importance of the state for sport governing bodies. Elite sport has become a measure of international prestige.<sup>10</sup> The mission of the state in Russian physical culture and sport is presented in the “Strategy of developing physical culture and sport in the Russian Federation until 2030”.<sup>11</sup> The formation of a capable and sustainable system and effective regulations have become the main directions of state policy.

The key focus in analyzing sport governance and managerial relations is the cooperation between sport federations or confederations and state bodies in the country.<sup>12</sup> The governance structure of sport in Russia has a pronounced bureaucratic nature, according to Jean Camy’s VOCASPORT classification.<sup>13</sup> The Sport Ministry of Russia is the top executive sport body. The main regulator of relationships of entities in Russian sport is the Federal Law “On Physical Culture and Sport in the Russian Federation”.<sup>14</sup> According to the law, the status of a NSF must be accredited by the Sport Ministry every four years.

Public sport organizations registered in Russia as of September 2021 included:

- 107 national federations servicing 110 different sports;
- 30 national federations which have not received their status yet;
- 5,531 regional federations in 141 sports.<sup>15</sup>

One of the most important and challenging tasks for NSFs in Russia is the development of a strategic plan. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) requirements are based on the goals and objectives of strategic plans developed by federations for four-year Olympic cycles. When

---

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Grix & Fiona Carmichael, *Why do governments invest in Elite Sport? A polemic*, 4 INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SPORT POLICY AND POLITICS 73 (2011).

<sup>11</sup> State Government of the Russian Federation, *Strategy on Development of Physical Culture and Sport in the Russian Federation for the period up to 2030* (Sept. 24, 2020), <http://static.government.ru/media/files/Rr4JTrKDQ5nANTR1Oj29BM7zJBHXM05d.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> JEROEN SCHEERDER, ANNICK WILLEM & ELIEN CLAES, *SPORT POLICY SYSTEMS AND SPORT FEDERATIONS: A CROSS-NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE* (2017).

<sup>13</sup> VOCASPORT Research Group, *Improving employment in the field of sport in Europe through vocational training* (2004), [http://kirolan.org/EI%20sector%20del%20empleo%20deportivo/0.1.1%20lotvocasport\\_en.pdf](http://kirolan.org/EI%20sector%20del%20empleo%20deportivo/0.1.1%20lotvocasport_en.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Kremlin, *Federal Law on Physical Culture and Sport in the Russian Federation*, PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA (2007), <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/26631> (last visited Feb 4, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> Sport Ministry, MINISTRY OF SPORT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, <http://www.minsport.gov.ru/en/> (last visited Feb 4, 2022).

preparing the plans, prospects of sport development in Russia are analyzed, and tasks, activities and targets are defined. The annual KPI analysis is aimed at assessing the dynamics of sport development and the justification of the allocation of state subsidies for each NSF. In many cases, however, the plans are declarative in nature: responsibilities, achievement of target indicators and funding are not clearly established and often are duplicated by state or regional sports governing bodies.<sup>16</sup> An important part of the sport development plans is a targeted complex program which defines NSFs purposes, tasks, measures and targets for preparation and performance of the Russian Olympic team.

Sport federations experience difficulties in the new conditions, particularly lack of financial and human resources. The company “Financial and Accounting Consultants” conducted a survey among the heads of the NSFs in 2020<sup>17</sup> and 57% of federations indicated the need for qualified personnel in:

- a) planning and implementation of training programs for the Olympic Games;
- b) organization of competitions;
- c) legal support;
- d) financial and economic planning;
- e) information technologies;
- f) marketing;
- g) personnel assessment and training.

Furthermore, 62% of surveyed federations indicated they need staff with experience in international activities and 67% - with anti-doping activities.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study combined the analyses of empirical observations, official and research reports, as well as databases. The texts of legal and regulatory documents and reports of the Russian federal government, of sport organizations, and research publications were used to develop

---

<sup>16</sup> Tamara Dolmatova, Sergey Altukhov & Peter Smolianov, *Staff members matter the most? Evaluation of governing board composition of the Russian national sport federations as a tool for good governance*, SPORTS SCIENCE BULLETIN 1 (2022).

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Sport of Russia, *Tools for Assessing the Performance of Sports Federations* (2021), <https://minsport.gov.ru/2021/doc.pdf> (last visited Feb. 07, 2022)

criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of sport federations based on their quantitative board composition assessment.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1. QUANTITATIVE COMPOSITION OF GOVERNING BODIES**

The analysis of the quantitative composition of board members showed that the represented federations could be divided into three groups with the number varying from 2 to 33 members. The first group consisted of organizations with a number of governing body members of 10 or less, the second group consisted of organizations with a number of governing body members from 11 to 24, and the third group, where there were more than 25 members of governing body. The overwhelming majority of sports federations belonged to the second category, with board members from 11 to 24, which made up 69% of the total number.

The first group of federations with the least membership (less than 10 members) included 9 sport federations of boxing (10 members), fencing (10), athletics (8), rowing slalom (8), volleyball (8), softball (8), triathlon (7), skateboarding (5), and surfing (2 members), which was 21% of the total, and the federations with the largest number of members included 4 sport federations for tennis (33 members), football (30), wrestling (27), and artistic gymnastics (25 members), which was 10% of the total.

### **4.2. GENDER DIVERSITY**

All of the 39 organizations represented could be divided into five groups:

- (1) federations with more than 50% women on their boards;
- (2) federations with 25 to 49% of women on their boards;
- (3) federations with 10 to 24% of women on their boards;
- (4) federations with less than 10% women on their boards;
- (5) and federations with no women on their boards.

The federations with the highest proportion of women on the boards governed the two traditional women's sports of synchronized swimming (84.2%) and artistic gymnastics (80%)

as well as surfing (50%), which made up 7.7% of the total number of federations under consideration. The second group of federations in which the percentage of women on the boards ranged from 25 to 49%, included 10 sports of softball (25.0%), basketball (28.6%), equestrian (29.4%) shooting (31.3%), diving (35.3%), athletics (37.5%), rowing slalom (37.5%), trampolining (40.9%), triathlon (42.9%) and climbing (44.4%), represented about 25.6% of the total.

The third and largest group included 12 federations for the sports of badminton (21.1%), skateboarding (20.0%), tennis (18.2%), archery (17.6%), rowing (16, 7%), water polo (16.7%), baseball (15.0%), canoeing and kayaking (14.3%), handball (12.5%), fencing (10.0%), boxing (10.0%), and football (10.0%), representing 30.8% of the total.

Another 9 NSFs of swimming (9.5%), table tennis (7.7%), golf (7.1%), modern pentathlon (7.1%), field hockey (6.3%), sailing (6.3%), taekwondo (5.9%), cycling (5.0%) and wrestling (3.7%) were in group 4, with less than 10% women on their boards, which was 23.1% of the total. The federations without women on their boards governed judo, karate, volleyball, weightlifting and rugby, representing 12.8% of the total.

In the overwhelming majority of Russian NSFs (79.54%) the share of women in the governing boards was from 10 to 50% of the total number of members, and in another 7.70% of federations the share of women was over 50%. The cumulative figure for the number of women on the boards of all Russian federations in summer Olympic sports was 20.21% which does not meet global criteria for the proportion of women in the governing bodies of sports federations to be no less than 30%. Only a quarter of the represented sport federations met this 30% benchmark. Thus, the majority of Russian federations still are to catch up with the global trend of increasing the share of women on governing boards to ensure gender diversity.

### **4.3. PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE OF BOARD MEMBERS**

Board members with sport-specific professional experience such as athletes, coaches were present in the majority (62.03%) of respondents, while 450 of the 640 or 70.3% of members had some sporting experience including recreational participation. A large proportion of board members had experience as public or government servants (19.22%), followed by the categories of businesspersons (6.72%), elected political officials (1.25%), lawyers (1.25%), military officers (1.09%), medical professionals (0.78%), marketers (0.78%), engineers (0.63%), academicians (0.63%) and journalists (0.47%).

Examples of NSFs in which more than two thirds of the board members had experience in sporting activities were the national federations of athletics (75%), diving (88.24%), fencing (90%), rock climbing (94.44%). At the same time, in baseball and basketball federations 100% of the board executives had experience in professional sports activities.

#### 4.4. DISCUSSIONS

It is interesting to compare the characteristics of NSF board composition with their performance, particularly the results of the 2020 summer Olympics in Tokyo. The correlation between the quantitative composition of the board and results of athletes' performances (the number of gold medals and total score of Russian athletes) revealed that medals were won by the athletes of federations from all three size groups: with the least, average and the greatest number of board members.

The greatest number of gold medals (4) was received in wrestling (27 board members, Group 3), followed with 3 gold medals in fencing (10 board members, Group 2).<sup>18</sup> Two medals each were won by athletes in synchronized swimming (5 board members, Group 1), artistic gymnastics (35 board members, Group 3), shooting (16 board members, Group 2), swimming (21 board members, Group 2) and taekwondo (16 board members, Group 2). Russian athletes took one gold each in athletics (8 board members, Group 1), boxing (13 board members, Group 2) and tennis (33 board members, Group 3).<sup>19</sup>

This pattern is similar for the total medal ranking. The greatest number of medals in Tokyo Olympics was won by athletes of federations whose boards consisted of both more than 25 and less than 10 members. For example, a total of 10 medals of various merits were won in artistic gymnastics (35 board members, Group 3), 8 medals in wrestling (27 board members, Group 3), 8 medals in shooting (16 board members, Group 2) and 8 medals in fencing (10 board members, Group 1). Thus, the analysis showed that such a criterion as the NSFs number of board members does not affect the efficiency of sports federations on such a criterion as the number of Olympic medals won.

---

<sup>18</sup> International Olympic Committee, *Tokyo 2020 Wrestling Results*, IOC (2021), <https://olympics.com/en/olympic-games/tokyo-2020/results/wrestling> (last visited Nov 28, 2021).

<sup>19</sup> International Olympic Committee, *Tokyo 2020 Results*, IOC (2021), <https://olympics.com/en/olympic-games/tokyo-2020/results> (last visited Feb 07, 2022).

The results of national teams seem to be influenced more by the experience of professional activities and coherence of the work of the governing boards than by their quantitative composition. The best results, measured by the number of gold medals at the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, were shown by athletes of federations where the greatest proportion of the board consisted of former highly qualified athletes or coaches. The wrestling federation's athletes won the most gold medals (4), and 66.67% of its board members were highly qualified athletes or coaches. Second place was taken by the Fencing Federation with three gold medals, 90% of whose board members were former athletes and coaches. Russian Synchronized Swimming and Artistic Gymnastics Federations had 2 gold medals each while 78.95% and 60% of their board members had experience in professional sport activities respectively. Athletes from the Shooting, Swimming and Taekwondo federations have also won two Olympic gold medals each, with 75.0%, 71.43% and 58.82% of the total number of governing body members being former athletes or coaches, respectively.

These values indicate that the predominant share of highly qualified athletes or coaches in the composition of the board directly affects the high results of athletes in this sport. Out of 10 Russian federations, whose athletes won from 1 to 4 gold medals, the share of highly qualified athletes or coaches in the composition of the board was more than 50%.

No correlation was found between gender diversity and the number of medals won by athletes at the Olympic Games in Tokyo. Gold medals at the 2020 Olympics were won both by athletes from federations with the highest number of women on their boards (artistic gymnastics, synchronized swimming) and by federations with 25 to 50% women on their boards (shooting, athletics) and even by federations with no women on their governing bodies (weightlifting). Clearly, the top-class schools for training athletes in these sports and the well-established traditions drive success and influence the proportion of women in governance positions.

Analyzing the composition of Russian NSFs' boards by age, we refer to the classification by the World Health Organization and use the following age categories: up to 44 years old (young age), 45-59 years old (middle age), 60-74 years old (old age) and 75 years old and older.<sup>20</sup>

On November 18, 2021, in the Russian federations of summer Olympic sports there were no managers older than 75 years old. Despite the fact that the age of the leaders varied considerably depending on the sport, it was possible to identify some general trends. The oldest

---

<sup>20</sup> Health Tips, *Advanced age of the WHO classification – is how much?*, HEALTH TIPS (Aug. 12, 2017), <https://healthtipsing.com/en/pages/41256>



leaders were presidents of the Russian federations of artistic gymnastics (73 years), canoeing and kayaking (67), fencing (69), judo (70), tennis (73), taekwondo (74), trampoline (67). The youngest presidents are leaders of the federations of triathlon (30years), surfing (34), skateboarding (40), basketball (40), field hockey (42), badminton (43), rowing (43) and rock climbing (43). The young age of the heads of the federations of these sports could be explained by the fact that most of these sports have entered the Olympic program quite recently. Triathlon competitions for the first time appeared at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, while rock climbing, skateboarding, and surfing made their debut only at the Olympics 2020 in Tokyo.

Young leaders under 40 years of age accounted for only 10%, and board members under 44 accounted for less than 20% of the total number of leaders of Russian summer Olympic sport federations. The number of board members at the age of 45 to 59 was 45%, and 35% of leaders at the age of 60 to 74 years old. Thus, the majority of leaders of Russian NSFs were in the age group from 45 to 59 years old, which constituted 55%. The average age of a leader of the Russian NSF in summer sports was 56 years old (as of November 18, 2021). This indicated a high level of experience in professional activities available to the leaders of this age group. However, it is perhaps advisable that Russian NSFs seek to recruit more young professionals to their boards so that decision-making processes can benefit from the input of people with more contemporary life experiences and interests.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The quantitative and qualitative composition of Russian sport federations' governing boards has been determined by the Soviet athlete training traditions, as well as the specific regulations of particular sport. However, the board structure is increasingly influenced by standards of international sport federations. Board members' former experience as professional athletes and coaches is correlated with federations' performance, but no correlation was found for the number of board members, their age and gender. Increasing the proportion of women on boards may bring greater success as long as these women are highly qualified and have professional experience as competitors and coaches. Russian NSF board members' average age of 56 allows them to accumulate experience they need to make the national sports federations effective, as evidenced by the success of Russian athletes. KPI of federations' activities will also be based on such criteria as medal plan, number of engaged participants, coaches, judges, regional sports federations, and anti-doping activities.

## REFERENCES

- Dolmatova, T., Altukhov, S., Smolianov, P. (2022). Staff members matter the most? Evaluation of governing board composition of the Russian national sport federations as a tool for good governance. *Sports Science Bulletin*.
- Dushanin, A.P. (2019). About system of sport governance in the Russian Federation. Presentation at the meeting of the Public Council of the Sport Ministry of the Russian Federation.
- Federal Law on Physical Culture and Sport in the Russian Federation. (2007). <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/26631>.
- Galkin, V.V. (2006). Economy and governance in physical culture and sport. Moscow, Fenix.
- Girginov, V., Smolianov, P., Dolmatova, T. (2021). Multi-level leadership in Russian elite sport. In Andersen, S., Hansen, P., Houlihan, B., *Embedded Multi-Level Leadership in Elite Sport*, (pp. 63-80). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Grix, J. & Carmichael, F. (2012). Why do governments invest in elite sport? A polemic, *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*.
- HealthTips. (2017). Advanced age of the WHO classification – is how much? 2017. <https://healthtipsing.com/en/pages/41256>
- International Olympic Committee. (2021). Tokyo 2020 Results. <https://olympics.com/en/olympic-games/tokyo-2020/results>
- International Olympic Committee. (2021). Tokyo 2020 Wrestling Results <https://olympics.com/en/olympic-games/tokyo-2020/results/wrestling>
- McLeod, J., Star, S., & Shilbury, D. (2021). Board composition in national sport federations: A cross-country comparative analysis of diversity and board size. *Managing Sport and Leisure*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23750472.2021.1970614>
- Ministry of Sport of Russia. (2021). Tools for Assessing the Performance of Sports Federations. <https://minsport.gov.ru/2021/doc.pdf>
- Scheerder, J., Willem, A., & Claes, E. (Eds.). (2017). Sport policy systems and sport federations. A cross-national perspective. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sport Ministry. (2021, September 18). Ministry of Sport of the Russian Federation. <http://sport.minstm.gov.ru>
- State Government of the Russian Federation. (2020). Strategy on development of physical culture and sport in the Russian Federation for the period up to 2030. (in Russ.). <http://static.government.ru/media/files/Rr4JTrKDQ5nANTR1Oj29BM7zJBHXM05d.pdf>
- The Moscow Times. (2020). Russia banned for two years in Landmark CAS Ruling. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/12/17/russia-banned-for-two-years-in-landmark-cas-ruling-a72399>.
- Timchenko, V., Kaisheva, K., Timchenko, V. (2017). The Russian sport industry, In book: Sport Business in Leading Economies. 10.1108/978-1-78743-563-620171010
- VOCASPORT Research Group. (2004). Vocational education and training in the field of sport in the European Union: situation, trends and outlook. Lyon: European Observatoire of Sport and Employment.