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Robert Weiner and Adjanni Ramos: IOC and local committees must confront their past mistakes

Salt Lake City will have issues to confront if it hosts the Olympics again.



(Charlie Riedel | AP) People stand under a set of Olympic Rings as they watch the sun set over the Black Sea a day after the close of the 2014 Winter Olympics, in Sochi, Russia, Monday, Feb. 24, 2014.

By Robert Weiner and Adjanni Ramos | Special to The Tribune
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It took bombing a maternity ward, photos of horrific mass graves and cities reduced to rubble in an unprovoked war against Ukraine to finally get [Russia banned from the Paralympics](#) by the

International Olympic Committee and from world soccer, ongoing skating championships and most other sports.

The Olympics have now asked sports associations to ban the Russians. Apparently, state-sponsored drug cheating, rigging other countries' elections, bribing officials to host world cups and calling the head of FIFA a Nobel Prize winner for giving Russia the World Cup bid before he was fired for corruption weren't enough.

There are a series of questions that the International Olympic Committee and future local organizing committees — perhaps including Salt Lake City — will have to consider. The IOC needs to give clear answers on why it blocked parents, didn't disqualify Russia — especially its star skater — and ignored China's human rights violations.

In its upcoming conference calls and meetings — for their “after-action” reports — the IOC and its executive committee face these and other serious issues they need to confront for the Olympics to be successful in the next several cycles.

In the Beijing Games, there were heroes and Utah performers to celebrate, with 19 Utah residents winning medals, including individual Gold medalists Nathan Chen, Alex Hall and Erin Jackson.

However, during the 2002 Salt Lake City Games, the IOC, doping officials and local police partnered and enforced the Olympics' anti-doping laws. The games reserved seats for parents, and there were no human rights crackdowns needed against innocents.

The Beijing backdrop, which the networks had to include given the diplomatic boycott, was that China was forcing its Uyghur minority into concentration camps. Tennis player Peng Shuai had to claim her allegations of rape against a former Chinese vice-president was a misunderstanding. China has a history of silencing problems.

Last year, to cope with the death of her mother, Sha'Carri Richardson smoked marijuana in a state where it was legal before heading to the 2022 Tokyo Olympics. The US Anti-Doping Agency then suspended Richardson. The fact that the Court of Arbitration allowed Russian athlete Kamila Valieva to continue to compete after testing positive for endurance-improving heart medication because it would cause “irreparable harm” is preposterous.

They accepted Valieva because she's a minor, but if she's a minor and requires drugs to compete at the same level as adults, then she should be judged and treated as an adult with regards to her narcotics use.

We asked several 14- and 15-year-olds if they were told the rules before they played a sports event, and they all said “yes” or “of course” and asserted they “played by the rules.” If you're in the Olympics, you play by the Olympics' clear rules. Olympic champion Scott Hamilton was right when he said, “She should have been sent home.”

Incidentally, questions remain on how Valieva fell just enough (two falls, two slips) to remove her from the podium while two other Russians got gold and silver. At the end of her program, she slammed her arm down as though to say, “Take that.” Who knows what the Russian program leaders made her do to avoid a medal ceremony embarrassment.

During the 2021 Tokyo Paralympics, blind and deaf athlete Becca Meyers had to withdraw because the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee, which is part of the IOC, denied her a “reasonable and essential accommodation” by blocking her mother – her caretaker — from attending.

The Paralympics insisted there would be a personal care assistant there, one she never worked with. To say that these were the rules insisted by Tokyo due to coronavirus is not an answer.

Shaun White described the moment when his mother hugged him after his gold medal during the 2006 Olympics. “The magnitude of what I had just done hit when my mom hugged me.” These athletes lost that moment last year. How do you expect them to act without their parents there? Elections are being won and lost right now in America based on allowing parental decision-making. Teens need parents in their lives. If the Olympics is the sports model for “educating youth,” they must include parents.

The IOC has complete control and final say on how the Olympics are run. They conducted both the 2020 Games in 2021 and then the 2022 Games in a worldwide pandemic. The COVID restrictions mostly worked. However, they learned important lessons and must do more to celebrate. We assume and hope that the reason for the Ukrainian war suspension is only temporary and that peace will come soon. The Olympics will be better if they learn from the recent questions and experiences.



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