

OPC-DPS 23 TOOLKIT: ADDENDUM C

THE OLYMPICS & PARALYMPICS & WAR: FACT SHEET



“Wars break out because nations misunderstand each other. We shall not have peace until the prejudices which now separate the different races shall have been outlived. To attain this end, what better means than to bring the youth of all countries... together.”

- Pierre de Coubertin



- ✦ The Olympic and Paralympic movements are not immune from nationalism, armed conflict, or geo-political tensions that undermine the Olympic Mission of a **‘better and more peaceful world’**. The modern Olympic movement was birthed on the cusp of the 20th Century, one of mankind’s most bloody and war-ridden eras. The Games were cancelled three times (1916, 1940 and 1944 due to World War I and II, respectively) and disrupted numerous other times (see especially 1976, 1980, and 1984 boycotts) Medal counts, national anthems, and flag-draping and flag-themed uniforms all amplify nationalistic gestures during the Games.
- ✦ A total of **664** Olympians had their lives and futures cut short by wars and armed conflicts during the modern Olympic era. Every continent has lost sons, fathers, brothers, uncles, cousins, and friends with Germany suffering the most casualties with 146 dead Olympians, followed by Great Britain with 79. (Source: www.olympedia.org). The first known modern Olympic casualty of war was Otello Capitani, an Italian Artistic Gymnast from the 1908 Games killed in action (KIA) on 20 September 1912 during the Italo-Turkish War in Misrata, Libya. The most recent known Olympian killed was Ezedin Tlish, a Libyan Taekwondo athlete from the 2004 and 2008 Games killed in August 2011 during the 2011 Libyan uprising. The Olympic sports accounting for the most loss of lives from war are as follows: Track & Field - 142, Rowing – 61, and Soccer - 58.
- ✦ The Paralympic movement was founded in 1948 following the large number of physical injuries sustained in WW II, though para-sport has existed for more than 100 years. A follow-up competition took place in 1952, with athletes from the Netherlands joining the British competitors. In 1960 the first quadrennial Olympic-style Games for disabled athletes were held in Rome with organizing help from the World Veterans Federation; the quadrennial Winter Games were added in 1976, in Sweden. Since the Seoul 1988 Olympic Games (and the 1992 Winter Olympics in Albertville, France), the Paralympics have been held at the Olympic venues and have used the same facilities (Source: www.Britannica.com).
- ✦ The number of lost and dead Olympians due to war and armed conflict has decreased dramatically since the first half of the 20th Century when WW II accounted for some 452 dead (68% of all Olympians lost to war) and WW I for some 169 dead (25% of all Olympians lost to war). 16 other conflicts, including Wars of Liberation (Libya, Algeria, Morocco, Romania), Civil wars and unrest (Cuban, Spanish Civil War), and other conflicts (Vietnam, Turko-Greek, Finnish-Soviet, Sino-Jap, among others) account for the remaining 43 casualties. Advanced battlefield medical treatments mean more veterans are returning home with wounds and injuries, yielding a larger population of potential Paralympic athletes. Roughly 20-25% of TEAM USA Paralympians are veterans and various competitions (U.S.-based Warrior Games, global Invictus Games) specifically serve the veteran para-sport community.

The Olympic Truce (Source: IOC, <https://olympics.com/ioc/olympic-truce>):

“The tradition of an ‘Olympic Truce’ or “Ekecheiria” was established in Ancient Greece in the 9th century BC by the signature of a treaty between three kings. During the Truce period, athletes, artists, and their families, as well as ordinary pilgrims, could travel in total safety to participate in or attend the Olympic Games and return afterwards to their respective countries. As the opening of the Games approached, the sacred truce was proclaimed and announced by citizens of Elis who travelled throughout Greece to pass on the message. Considering the global context in which sport and the Olympic Games exist, the IOC decided in recent years to revive the ancient concept of the Olympic Truce with a view to protecting, as far as possible, the interests of the athletes and sport in general, and to encourage the search for peaceful and diplomatic solutions to the conflicts around the world. Since 1993, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly has repeatedly expressed its support for the Olympic Truce ideal and for the IOC’s mission by adopting, every two years – one year before each edition of the Olympic Games – a resolution entitled ‘Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal.’”

In 2016, the IOC established the **‘Refugee Olympic Athletes Team,’** - a catch-all for displaced athletes from conflict regions to compete under a neutral flag. The Olympic and Paralympic Games won’t end war, pandemics, climate change, human right abuses, or a slew of other existential crises facing the planet, but they might inspire humanity to dream **‘Faster, Higher, Stronger - Together!’** (Olympic Motto) independent of race, creed, age, gender, or social status -- in sport and beyond.