

## The Will to Win: Spirit of Ukrainian Athletes - an Olympic Testimony

As the Summer Olympic Games approach, set to begin on July 26 in Paris, the world's attention turns not just to athletic prowess but to the indomitable spirit of human perseverance. For Ukraine, this year's Games are a powerful symbol of strength, resilience and defiance. And this spirit of perseverance transcends beyond the challenges each athlete faces leading up to the Games, embodying the resistance against the ongoing atrocities of the Russian invasion.

Ukraine's athletes have faced unimaginable challenges. Since the onset of the war, more than 500 sports facilities have been destroyed, and nearly 500 athletes have been killed, with many more injured. Not one of their lives remained untouched in some horrible way as a result. Despite the relentless air raids and the devastation of their homes and training grounds, Ukrainian athletes continue to prepare for the Olympics, embodying the unbreakable will of their nation.

This extraordinary tenacity underscores the strength and spirit of Ukraine. The athletes' stories showcase perseverance in its purest form. These stories are numerous, each reflecting the nation's unyielding resolve and will to win despite overwhelming odds. As the Games unfold, they will highlight the broader struggle for freedom and justice, inspiring all who witness their remarkable journeys.

However, as Ukraine's athletes prepare to compete, they face an unfair playing field. The International Olympic Committee's decision to allow Russian athletes to participate under a "neutral" flag is deeply troubling. This so-called neutrality is a facade; many of these athletes have ties to the Russian military or have openly supported the war. The presence of these athletes in international competitions not only undermines the sacrifices made by Ukrainian athletes but also sends a dangerous message that the global community is willing to overlook aggression and war crimes.

Vadym Huttsait, Ukraine's Sports Minister, has vocally opposed the inclusion of Russian athletes, emphasising the moral and ethical implications. He has called for a ban on Russian athletes, citing their country's actions that violate the very principles of peace and humanity that the Olympics stand for. The Ukrainian stance is clear: **the Olympic Games should not be a platform for states that commit atrocities against their neighbors.**

The story of Ukraine's athletes is not just about sports, it's a testament to the human spirit. It is about honoring the memory of the athletes who have lost their lives, drawing attention to the brutal realities of the Russian invasion, and rallying support for those who continue to stand tall against oppression. The resilience of these athletes mirrors the larger struggle of Ukraine - a fight for sovereignty, freedom, and dignity. Their will to win is not just about victory in sport but a stand against tyranny.

As the world watches the 2024 Olympics, let us not just celebrate athletic achievements but also recognise the profound courage of Ukrainian athletes. Their participation is a powerful act of defiance, a statement that despite the destruction and despair, the spirit of Ukraine cannot be extinguished. Supporting these athletes is not just a gesture of solidarity with a sporting team but an affirmation of our shared humanity and a stand against tyranny and violence.

So while we cheer for our favorite athletes and marvel at their performances, let us also honor the bravery of those who compete under the shadow of war. The Ukrainian Olympic team's journey to Paris is a beacon of hope and a poignant reminder of the resilience that defines the human spirit. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that the true essence of the Olympics - a celebration of peace, unity, and human excellence - is upheld. Let us stand with Ukraine, not just in words, but in every action we take on the global stage.

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July 13, the Union of Ukrainians in France gathered 1,000 people in Paris for a peaceful march in memory of 488 Ukrainian athletes who died during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Participants wore T-shirts with the names of the fallen Ukrainian athletes



The Ukrainian World Congress "The Will to Win" campaign. Initiative is a partnership with the Ukrainian American Coordination Council, supported by the Office of the President of Ukraine, the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine, and the National Olympic Committee of Ukraine.