

**FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION: THE SUBJECT ON
EVERYBODY'S MINDS (BUT NOT LIPS) AT THE
BEIJING 2022 WINTER OLYMPICS**

by *Annie Rydén**

ABSTRACT: Beyond the Olympic facade of glitz and glamour, athletes competing at the 2022 Beijing Games faced double threats. On the one hand, there was the imminent and persistent threat of Covid-19. On the other hand, there was the fear of facing repercussions by Chinese authorities for speaking out about politics and the host nation's poor human rights record. This article addresses the latter concern. More specifically, it shines light on the International Olympic Committee's restriction on athletes' freedom of expression – in place for the purpose of “political neutrality” – and explores the potential routes for challenging infamous Rule 50(2) of the Olympic Charter. Taking into consideration the ever-increasing role that athletes play in the broader political discussion whilst noting the recent selection of Olympic host cities under authoritarian regimes, the article demonstrates the need for the International Olympic Movement to move away from its dubious and precarious position on athletes' freedom of expression towards a more progressive and proactive one.

Al di là della facciata di sfarzo e glamour, sugli atleti che hanno gareggiato ai Giochi Olimpici Pechino del 2022 incombeva una doppia minaccia. Da un lato l'opprimente e persistente Covid-19, dall'altro il timore di affrontare questioni di politica interna del Paese ospitante o di rispetto dei diritti umani, argomenti non graditi dalle autorità cinesi. Questo articolo affronta quest'ultimo aspetto, facendo luce sulle restrizioni del Comitato Olimpico Internazionale alla libertà di espressione degli atleti – poste in essere ai fini di “neutralità politica” – nonché sulla famigerata Regola 50(2) della Carta Olimpica. Prendendo in considerazione il ruolo sempre crescente degli atleti nella più ampia discussione politica, e allo stesso tempo la recente selezione di Paesi ospitanti sotto regimi autoritari, l'articolo evidenzia l'importanza di una posizione meno ambigua e più assertiva e progressista da parte del Movimento Olimpico Internazionale in ordine alla libertà di espressione degli atleti.

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Articolo 50(2) – Carta Olimpica – Comitato Olimpico Internazionale – “Neutralità Politica” – Libertà di Espressione – Giochi Olimpici – Diritti Umani

SUMMARY: 1. Introduction – 2. Politics and Athlete Activism at the Olympics – 3. The “Political Neutrality” of the IOC and the Olympic Games – 4. Private Restrictions on Athletes’ Freedom of Expression in the Name of Political Neutrality – 5. Restrictions on Athletes’ Freedom of Expression under Rule 50(2) – 6. Heightened Controversy Amidst Beijing 2022 – 7. From a Precarious Towards a Proactive Position on Freedom of Expression – 8. Conclusion