
THE EPHEMERAL TRAJECTORY OF MULTI-NATIONAL EVENTS AT THE YOUTH OLYMPIC GAMES

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SUMMARY

The multi-national events at the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) were first introduced on a confidential basis in 2007, with the 1st edition in 2010 at the Singapore YOG before the IOC decided, after six convincing editions, to abruptly end them in the mid-2020s.

As a true laboratory of innovation, the YOG has created new events. The example of the multi-national events is unique in that it allows us to analyse how these events represented a unique opportunity for athletes from different NOCs to compete as part of the same team. For more than a decade, from 2010 to 2020, they enabled young athletes from all over the world to compete for Olympic medals with a transnational flavour. From this perspective, an analysis of their protocol ceremonies and organisation highlights the absence of national flags and anthems.

Ultimately, the creation of these multi-national events in 2007 and their first implementation at the 2010 YOG seem to support the hypothesis that they play an original and unprecedented role in proving the identity of the YOG on the world Olympic and geopolitical stages. Despite their success, the lack of media recognition and the absence of various forms of nationalism that accompany Olympic victories led to their sudden abolition, closing the parentheses on denationalised and universal Olympism.

INTRODUCTION

Confidentially established in 2007, multi-national events at the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) were introduced at the first edition in Singapore in 2010 as an original way to celebrate the Olympic ideal by promoting unity and fraternity among people and nations (Olympics. org, 2024). On August 18, 2010, just four days after the launch of the first YOG, Italian fencers Marco Fichera, Camilla Mancini, Leonardo Affede, Alberta Santuccio, and Edoardo Luperi, alongside Russian fencer Yana Egorian, won the first-ever multi-national team gold medal in Olympic history. This multinational team embodied a groundbreaking vision at a time when the Olympic Games (OG) had long upheld a traditional view of Olympism (Guttmann, 1992; Augustin & Gillon, 2004; Tétart et al., 2004).

While these competitions provided an unprecedented opportunity for young athletes to transcend political and cultural divisions, how did these events contribute to the easing of geopolitical tensions? By encouraging cooperation among athletes from different nations, could these unique YOG events inspire the global youth to embrace the core values of Olympism, particularly mutual respect and fair play? Could the organisation of multinational events be seen as a bold innovation aimed at promoting a truly universal form of Olympism that transcends borders to unite people around a shared ideal of excellence, peace, and friendship?

While numerous studies have explored the YOG (Parry, 2012; Parent, 2024) and their educational and cultural programs (Judge et al., 2009; Hanstad et al., 2013; Schnitzer, 2012; Krieger, 2012; Schnitzer et al., 2018; Nordhagen & Fauske, 2018), few books or articles have specifically examined the unique issues surrounding multinational events. If these events were integral to the YOG and the Olympic Movement, what resistance did they face? The goal is to demonstrate that these competitions helped shift young athletes' perceptions and attitudes, fostering the acceptance of cultural diversity as a foundation for international cooperation and solidarity.

MULTI-NATIONAL EVENTS : AN UNPRECEDENTED INNOVATION ?

During the 119th session of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), held from 4 July to 7, 2007, in Guatemala, the creation of the YOG was officially approved under the influence of then-IOC President Jacques Rogge (Olympics.org, 2019). Since 2010, there have been three summer editions (Singapore 2010, Nanjing 2014, and Buenos Aires 2018) and four winter editions (Innsbruck 2012, Lillehammer 2016, Lausanne 2020, and Gangwon 2024). Since their inception, these "new" Olympic Games have been directly integrated into the expansion process of the Olympic Movement (Chappelet, 1991, 2023).

For the IOC and International Federations (IFs), the process of integrating these multi-national events began as soon as the YOG was officially created in July 2007. However, incorporating these events into the YOG program required substantial discussions within the International Federations, necessitating a relatively long process to modify their standard practices and introduce new disciplines that were absent from the traditional Olympic Games (Judge et al., 2009). Over two years, IFs worked to meet the expectations of both the IOC and the YOG by integrating innovative competitions such as multinational events (Hanstad et al., 2013). These took various forms: a Swedish relay in athletics, a multi-sport gymnastics competition bringing together all gymnastics disciplines (artistic gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, trampoline), and a team relay in badminton.

The objectives of the Olympic Movement are clear: first, to bring together young athletes for a high-level multi-sport competition within a sports festival focused on specific goals, including cultural and educational activities. Second, it aims to promote cultural exchange and Olympic values, including non-discrimination, fair play, and the pursuit of excellence. Additionally, the YOG seeks to establish dialogue and engage young people through digital platforms. Finally, the Youth Olympic Games remain a catalyst for innovation and an incubator for new concepts, such as testing and validating new sports and formats, educational initiatives, and technological projects aimed at increasing sustainability and creating programs that can be shared digitally.

Table 1: Multi-National Events at the Summer Youth Olympic Games (2010-2018)

Sport	Singapore 2010	Nanjing 2014	Buenos Aires 2018
Athletics	Continental teams Swedish 8x100m relay	Mixed-CNO teams relay	-
Badminton	Mixed-CNO teams Double mixed	Mixed-CNO teams Teams relay	-
Dance	-	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed team	-
Equestrian	Continental teams Jumping	Continental teams Jumping	Continental teams Jumping
Fencing	Continental teams Team tournament	Continental teams Team tournament	Équipes continentales Mixed teams
Gymnastics	-	Multi-CNO Multi discipline (Artistic, rhythmic, acrobatic gymnastic and trampoline)	-
Judo	Mixed-CNO teams Team	Mixed-CNO teams Team	Mixed-CNO teams Team
Modern Pentathlon	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed Relay	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed Relay	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed Relay
Diving	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed teams	Mixed-CNO teams Double mixed	-
Tennis	Mixed-CNO teams Doubles (H/F)	Mixed-CNO teams Doubles (H/F/M)	Mixed-CNO teams Doubles (H/F/M)
Table Tennis	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed teams	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed teams	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed teams
Shooting	Mixed-CNO teams Pistol 10m - mixed Rifle 10m - mixed	Mixed-CNO teams Pistol 10m - mixed Rifle 10m - mixed	-
Archery	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed teams	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed teams	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed teams
Triathlon	Continental teams Mixed Relay	Continental teams Mixed Relay	Continental teams Mixed Relay

The official recognition of these events only came in 2010 with the publication of Olympic Review No. 75 in June 2010, which officially but superficially introduced these multi-national events, stating: "There will be mixed events and others in which athletes from different NOCs will compete in the same team." Jacques Rogge, the founder of the Youth Olympic Games, further explained this concept in a 2007 interview with the French sports newspaper *L'Équipe*, emphasising how these events aligned with the Olympic ideology of the early 21st century: "During the medal ceremony, the only flag that will rise will be the Olympic flag, and the only anthem that will be played will be the Olympic anthem" (*L'Équipe*, 2007).

Table 2: Multi-National Events at the Winter Youth Olympic Games (2012-2024)

Sport	Innsbruck 2012	Lillehammer 2016	Lausanne 2020	Gangwon 2024
Curling	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed Doubles	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed Doubles	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed Doubles	-
Ice Hockey	-	-	Mixed-CNO teams 3x3 Tournament	-
Figure skating	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed teams	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed teams	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed teams	-
Speed Skating	Mixed-CNO teams Team Sprint	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed relay	-	-
Short-track speed skating	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed relay	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed relay	Mixed-CNO teams Mixed relay	-
Snowboarding	-	-	Mixed-CNO teams Team snow cross	-
Mixed Sport (ski + snowboard)	-	-	Mixed-CNO teams Teams relay	-
Ski mountaineering	-	-	Mixed-CNO teams Relay	-

Ultimately, multinational events represent a bold manifestation of the Olympic ideal, transcending national and ideological boundaries to promote unity and fraternity among young athletes. Each event organised during the seven editions of the YOG also aimed to address the growing disinterest of young people in the Olympic Movement (Zintz, 2023) by adapting competitions and values to meet new expectations and contemporary communication modes.

Through these multinational events, young athletes had the opportunity to embrace the Olympic values of excellence, respect, and friendship by competing together as part of teams composed of athletes from different National Olympic Committees (NOCs). In 2010, the teams were formed in various ways (random selection, results from individual competitions, etc.), with some composed of athletes from continental NOCs, such as in equestrian or fencing, while others featured mixed NOCs, such as in archery. For instance, in 2012, the winning short-track speed skating sprint team comprised athletes from Italy, China, South Korea, and Mongolia. This eclecticism was widely praised in the Olympic Review: "The speed skaters competed in the multi-NOC team sprint for the first time in the YOG program. [...] The winning team was composed of Italy's Noemi Bonazza, China's Shen Hanyang, South Korea's 500m bronze medallist Jae Woong, and Mongolia's Sumiya Buyantogtokh, who finished the 1.6 km race in 1'57"85. With this victory, Buyantogtokh became Mongolia's first-ever Winter Olympic medallist" (Olympic Review, 2012). Similarly, in 2020, issue 114 of the Olympic

Review highlighted the success of the 3x3 ice hockey competition at Lausanne 2020, noting that "Mexican athlete Luisa Wilson triumphed with the 'Yellow Stars' team, winning the women's tournament and securing her country's first-ever Winter Olympic medal."

Multinational events provide opportunities for certain nations to gain visibility on the Olympic stage by participating in major events such as the YOG, while also increasing their chances of winning medals. Since 2010, twenty-three NOCs have won their first-ever Olympic medal, or even their first gold medal, in multi-national events. This dynamic reflects the IOC's commitment to promoting Olympic universalism, particularly through Olympic Solidarity, which aims to provide equal opportunities for all NOCs. According to Zintz, "Olympic Solidarity plays a crucial role in helping various nations develop National Olympic Academies, promote coach and sports staff training. Olympic Solidarity accounts for 90% of the IOC resources. The philosophy is simple: 'The more you have, the less I give you; the less you have, the more I give you.' The same logic applies to NOCs, with greater investment in education and training for less wealthy NOCs compared to wealthier ones" (Zintz, 2023).

Thanks to multi-national events, the Olympic Movement aims, on the one hand, to promote friendship and respect among athletes and their cultures, and on the other, to introduce new ways of training, communicating, and playing different game strategies. Finally, by bringing together athletes from all backgrounds—racial, religious, ethnic, and social—international federations see these multi-national events as an opportunity to develop their disciplines in other countries and on other continents, as F. Lassalle reminds us: "Without practitioners, a discipline disappears" (Lassalle, 2017).

Furthermore, multinational events contribute to elevating certain nations on the geopolitical stage by securing Olympic medals. Since 2010, several National Olympic Committees (NOCs) have won their first gold medals in these events. For instance, in 2010, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Daryl Lokuku Ngambomo, gold medallist in judo at Singapore 2010), in 2014, the Comoros (Daou Aboubacar, gold medallist in athletics at Nanjing 2014), and the British Virgin Islands (Lakeisha Warner, gold medallist in athletics at Nanjing 2014) achieved their first Olympic triumphs. Four years later, in 2018, Cambodia (Vannthoun Vath, gold medallist in badminton at Buenos Aires 2018) and Honduras (Pedro Espinosa, gold medallist in equestrian at Buenos Aires 2018) earned their first Olympic medals. The same process applies to nations winning their first silver medals, such as Malta

(Jeremy Saywell, silver medallist in judo at Singapore 2010), Oman (Sultan Al Tooqi, silver medallist in equestrian at Singapore 2010), Turkmenistan (Jennet Geldybayeva, silver medallist in judo at Singapore 2010), and Madagascar (Mireille Andriamifehy, silver medallist in judo at Buenos Aires 2018). Similarly, the first bronze medallists include Papua New Guinea (John Ruvan, bronze medallist in the Swedish relay at Singapore 2010), Fiji (Lepani Naivalu, bronze medallist in the Swedish relay at Singapore 2010), Libya (Abduladim Mlitan, bronze medallist in equestrian at Singapore 2010), the Maldives (Hussain Fahumee, bronze medallist in athletics at Nanjing 2014), East Timor (Domingos Savio dos Santos, bronze medallist in athletics at Nanjing 2014), the Cayman Islands (Polly Serpell, bronze medallist in equestrian at Nanjing 2014), El Salvador (Sabrina Rivera Meza, bronze medallist in equestrian at Nanjing 2014), and Bhutan (Yangchen Wangmo, bronze medallist in judo at Buenos Aires 2018).

In total, 17 NOCs won their first Olympic medals through these multi-national events. For the winter YOG multi-national events between 2012 and 2020, the number of medal-winning athletes also saw a steady increase. At the 2012 YOG, 28 athletes won medals through multi-national events, rising to 52 at Lillehammer 2016 and 126 at Lausanne 2020. This represents an 86% increase between the Innsbruck and Lillehammer editions and a 143% increase between Lillehammer and Lausanne, resulting in an overall growth of 350%. This sharp rise reflects the expansion of disciplines offering multinational events, following the success of previous editions. Additionally, given the reduced number of disciplines (15 at Innsbruck 2012 and Lillehammer 2014, and 16 at Lausanne 2020), the numbers increased significantly.

Nevertheless, despite this growth, multi-national events still represent only a small portion of the YOG program: 5% in Innsbruck in 2012, 7% in Lillehammer in 2014, and 9% in Lausanne in 2020. Consequently, while their numbers have increased, they remain a marginal component of the YOG. This sharp rise is also explained by the introduction in 2020 of a multi-national team tournament in ice hockey, which allowed 78 athletes to win medals (each hockey team comprising 13 athletes, resulting in a total of 39 medals for boys and 39 for girls).

However, the creation of multinational events was not easy, as several resistances appeared during the first two decades of the 2000s. In an interview granted in 2016 to Svein Erik Nordhagen, Richard Pound expressed doubts about these competitions. According to him, the Youth Olympic program was

designed in Lausanne within a restricted framework, leaving little freedom for International Federations (IFs). He added that multinational events were not the result of widespread enthusiasm worldwide. Additionally, when reviewing the 2010 Singapore Youth Olympic Games, in an interview with Marc Chevrier, a journalist for the French sports daily L'Equipe, Jacques Rogge spoke about the multinational events, stating that he did not believe in "continental teams, which would bring too much imbalance" (Rogge, 2010). According to him, "The federations wanted them at the Youth Olympic Games to allow athletes eliminated in the first round to continue competing within these teams" (Rogge, 2010). Furthermore, while some IOC members seem to support these events, others show little interest, and some even criticised the management of the Olympic program. Finally, the differences between the IOC and the IFs seem to overshadow everything. From their first edition, it seemed difficult to imagine their sustainability, given the many disagreements and the little interest shown by the media worldwide.

However, by bringing together athletes from around the world, these events challenge the nationalistic supremacy of major sporting events (Tétart et al., 2004). While the question of nation and nationality was widely studied at the end of the 20th century, and the Olympic movement considers it as the "legal public bond uniting an individual to a given state, from which it results that the individual becomes the holder of a set of rights and obligations", explicit rules are enacted (Saint-Martin, 2010) to legislate these events, particularly to define selection criteria that force athletes to represent a united international team in competition. Athletes selected for a multinational team, therefore, do not represent their country of origin but rather their values, allowing the disappearance of any nationalist symbol that could be expressed through the presence of flags, jerseys, and/or emblems, as is systematically done in traditional editions of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (Tétart, 2019) and/or major international sports competitions (Boniface, 2002). Athletes with multiple nationalities seem to benefit from a surplus of sports and economic opportunities (Andrès, 2016), and the multinational events of the Youth Olympic Games represent a real opportunity since athletes are not forced to make a choice that could prove detrimental to their athletic future (Terret, 2011).

Beyond the simple addition of events, multinational events represent an innovation driven by the Olympic Movement within the organisation of the Youth Olympic Games. According to Alter, innovation can be described as a dynamic and evolving process of creating and adopting new ideas,

products, services, or practices that add value (Alter, 2010). Furthermore, innovation is not limited to invention; it also encompasses the diffusion and successful application of ideas in various contexts (Jain, 2023). It can be fuelled by scientific research, technological advancements, or even social and cultural changes. Therefore, innovation in the field of sports is much more than a simple process of creating and adopting new ideas (Hillairet, 1999), as it embodies a complex and multidimensional dynamic that shapes the evolution of modern sports. In the case of multinational events, this represents a significant innovation for the Olympic world, which is more accustomed to seeing nations compete for medals and prove their sporting superiority over other countries.

Thus, the organisation of multinational events represents a bold innovation towards authentically universal Olympism, transcending borders to unite people around a common ideal of excellence, peace, and friendship. From this perspective, these events contribute to perpetuating the myth of Olympic universalism (Bancel et al., 2023) by adapting the Olympic spirit to social and cultural developments.

AN INNOVATION OVERHEARD BY FRENH MEDIA?

A Very Discreet Media Interest

Media excitement in France began to rise a few months before the launch of the 2010 Singapore Youth Olympic Games (YOG). Whether it was Le Monde, Ouest France, France Soir, or Agence France Presse (AFP), media coverage started to gain momentum, although few details were provided on these multinational events. News outlets generally offered only brief explanations of the upcoming competitions, such as Le Monde's edition from 16 August 2010 which mentioned that "for the first time, the YOG also include continental team events," while Ouest France's edition stated that "symbolically, teams made up of Europeans, usually opponents, will face Americans or Asians in official competitions" (Ouest France, 2010). Despite the imminent approach of the competitions, information on the multinational events remained sparse, and no details were provided that would clarify their significance or stakes. The official program for the 2010 Singapore YOG listed nine disciplines featuring multinational events. French media were primarily interested in judo and fencing competitions: "For the first time, the YOG also offers continental team events (fencing and judo)" (Le

Monde, 2010). No information was shared regarding athletics, equestrian, modern pentathlon, archery, and triathlon competitions, where France's chances of winning medals seemed more uncertain, while the multinational events were presented as an opportunity to strengthen "bonds of friendship and promote understanding of various cultures and origins" (AFP, 2010).

Indeed, the strength of multinational events lies primarily in Jacques Rogge's vision of promoting a sport free from national hierarchy (Clastres, 2008), thus fostering peace between nations through sport. Multinational events thus become an additional demonstration of the myth of Olympic universalism: a competition open to all athletes from around the world, without discrimination based on race, religion, gender, or ethnicity, a competition that transcends national and cultural boundaries. Furthermore, Jacques Rogge intended to revitalise the Olympic Movement. In fact, all athletes awarded medals in these events have their medals attributed to the "Olympic Movement" rather than their respective nations. This approach symbolises a renewed desire to highlight athletes rather than nations. However, does the elimination of competition between nations risk harming the Olympic Movement? Similarly, while Article 6 of the Olympic Charter specifies that the Olympic Games are not a competition between nations, the medal table is increasingly used by nations to demonstrate their superiority or assess their performance at the highest level (Gómez & Delage, 2021).

The interest of the French media seems to be quite low. There is little information and few concrete details about this innovation, which seems to be considered central by the Olympic Movement. Media coverage of multinational events remains minimal and is often limited to occasional mentions. This discreet innovation, despite its positive values, still struggles to capture the attention of the French press, which is more accustomed to highlighting individual performances and heroic stories than to promoting an ideal in the service of Olympic Solidarity (Charitas, 2008; Polycarpe, 2016).

Another reason for this media disinterest appears to be the transnational medals earned by young athletes in international competitions. The medals won in multinational events are attributed to the "Olympic Movement", depriving National Olympic Committees (NOCs) of recognition for the medals and their position in the medal rankings. This disparity creates a significant imbalance between individual or national team competitions and international events. As a result, media coverage differs notably between medals earned in the regular framework of competitions, involving individual athletes or national teams, and those won in multinational events. The "unofficial" nature of these events,

which do not count towards the medal standings or the Olympic record, may be seen as a form of distraction by some athletes, as expressed by Tanguy Citron, who participated in the multinational badminton events at the 2014 Nanjing YOG: "We played against peers where you could tell they weren't really into the concept" (Citron, 2023). Similarly, Jolan Florimond, a silver medallist in judo at the 2014 Nanjing YOG, stated, "It's just another competition that ultimately doesn't really impact your personal career" (Florimond, 2023).

The competition then resembles a form of reward for the athletes, a moment of competition outside the stress of individual competition with no performance goals. It thus aligns with the Olympic motto: "excellence, friendship, respect." According to Thiziri Daci, a French pole vaulter who participated in the multinational relay at the 2014 Nanjing YOG, "It's an 8×100m relay, you know it's for fun, to unwind a bit and meet people" (Daci, 2023). This view is also shared by Nathan Nicoud, who participated in the ice hockey multinational team tournament at the 2020 Lausanne YOG: "It was fun, we had fun, there was no pressure, we were there to play. Honestly, it was really cool, it was great" (Nicoud, 2023).

A VARIABLE MEDIA COVERAGE OF MULTINATIONAL EVENTS

The regional French press gives particular attention to these multinational events and the medals won by the participants. Most articles highlight the performances of YOG athletes who represent a specific region (Occitanie, Rhône-Alpes, etc.), club (Montpellier Judo Olympic, etc.), or national sports federation (resource centres, expertise, and sports performance centres, etc.). This phenomenon is explained by the desire to give more value to regional sports power or that of a club. As a result, many regional newspapers published articles celebrating the medals obtained and regarding them as any other medal. In 2012, during the Winter YOG in Innsbruck, the leading newspaper in the Lyon region, the second largest city in France, *Le Progrès*, highlighted the performance of Estelle Elizabeth and Romain Le Gac in figure skating after they won a bronze medal in a multinational team event (*Le Progrès*, 2012). In 2014, the leading newspaper in southern France, *Midi Libre*, published an article about Jolan Florimont, a silver medallist in judo, with the headline: "He participated in the YOG" (*Midi Libre*, 2014). In 2016, during the YOG in Lillehammer, the duo of Julia Wagret and Mathieu Couyras was featured in an article in the regional daily *Le Progrès* after winning a silver medal in

figure skating (Le Progrès, 2016). Julia Wagret even received an individual article in La Voix du Nord, the leading newspaper in Northern France (La Voix du Nord, 2016). After the 2018 Buenos Aires YOG, Le Parisien highlighted Léonice Huet's silver medal in badminton (Le Parisien, 2018), six months before two other articles dedicated to this same victory were published in La République du Centre (La République du Centre, 2019) and Le Berry Républicain (Le Berry Républicain, 2019).

Despite these few and rare examples, many French athletes, such as Yoann Martinez (Short-track speed skating), Morgane Duschesnes (Judo), Quentin Fercoq (Short-track speed skating), Kyla Thouraine-Hélias (Archery), Emilie Morier (Triathlon), Ludmila Bourcet (Ice Hockey), Nathan Nicoud (Ice Hockey), Maël Halladj (Ice Hockey), Hugo Galvez (Ice Hockey), Gabriel Volet (Short-track speed skating), and Chana Beitone (Curling), did not receive regional, let alone national, media coverage. This lack of media coverage illustrates the lack of recognition for these performances and the limited interest of the French press in the feats achieved by these women. For some athletes, this absence of interest can be explained by the lack of communication prior to these multinational events and their spontaneous nature of occurrence. According to Jolan Florimond, the press cannot be solely blamed for the sudden organisation of certain events: "We found out the day before. There was a sheet made according to the YOG results... everyone was in a team with a different name. It was instantaneous, like everything else... I found out that, at the time, we were competing together in the competition " (Florimond, 2023). For Mélanie Gaubil, who participated in the mixed archery events at the 2014 Nanjing YOG, the element of surprise was the reason for the lack of media coverage of multinational events: "You have your qualifications, and I think it was the next day, we had a mixed match", "Honestly, when I arrived at the YOG, for me, ... I discovered during the training and the training sessions that there was a mixed event with someone from another country," "I learned on the go. For me, there was an individual event that occurred. I thought there was a mixed event" (Gaubil, 2023). This aspect is further confirmed by Tanguy Citron and Thiziri Daci: "We found out as soon as we arrived at the competition. I was expecting to only compete in singles, and then when I arrived, my coach told me, 'For this edition, there will also be a mixed doubles competition with a draw.' I was like 'Okay, I didn't know, but it's cool.' So, you play more, and it's fun" (Citron, 2023); "We didn't know right away, they must have told us... we didn't know from the beginning when we arrived in China. They must have told us during the week, saying that this event would take place" (Daci, 2023).

The lack of recognition given to these multinational events creates a gap between the results of individual competitions and the Olympic medals obtained. Roger Enguerrand (Fencing, Nanjing 2014), Armand Spichiger (Fencing, Buenos Aires 2018), and Emilie Morier (Triathlon, Nanjing 2014) are the three French athletes who won two medals (individual and multinational team) in the same edition of the Youth Olympic Games (YOG). For them, media coverage differs between their individual medals and those won in a multinational team event. Indeed, individual performances seem to be more highlighted, as is the case with Armand Spichiger, who won a gold medal both individually and in the continental teams. The Lyon newspaper *Le Progrès* simply mentioned that "he also won the gold medal in the continental team event" (*Le Progrès*, 2018). This trend was confirmed a few months later by another article from the same newspaper announcing the fencer's presence "after his title of Youth Olympic Champion won in October" (*Le Progrès*, 2019). Thus, despite the recognition of multinational events and the medals they offer, these remain less significant when an athlete wins an individual medal, which seems to be regarded as more prestigious. This prestige reveals much about the level of recognition given to medals won in multinational events, as if these medals were, in social representations and collective imaginations, considered second-rate or inferior. The most significant example is that of Coralie Gassama, who won a silver medal in the 8×100m relay (athletics), for whom several articles in *Paris Normandie* were written about her ambitions in individual events (*Paris Normandie*, 2014a), showcasing her high aspirations (*Paris Normandie*, 2014b) based on her individual performances (*Paris Normandie*, 2014c). The media coverage of this athlete's performances ultimately reflects the disinterest in the silver medal won in the multinational event compared to her 10th place in the individual athletics event, which received extensive press coverage, while her podium finish in the multinational event went unnoticed by the media.

The French national press hardly echoes the medals won. In the 2014 YOG review: "with the exception of athletics, most sports traditionally known for providing medals at the Olympics suffered in comparison. Cycling and equestrian sports did not even qualify a single representative, and judo came back empty-handed" (*L'Équipe*, 2014). However, in judo, Morgane Duchêne and Jolan Florimont won gold and bronze medals, respectively. In 2016, during the Lillehammer YOG, an article mentioned Quentin Fercoq's gold medal in the multinational short track speed skating event but clarified that "the event did not count towards the medal table. France thus remains with a total of six medals" (*L'Équipe*,

2016a). The next day, the newspaper L'Équipe headlined "six medals for the Blue Team" (L'Équipe, 2016b) excluding the three medals obtained in multinational events. This difference in coverage can be explained by reduced nationalist prestige, as shown by the newspaper La Croix, which discussed the 20 medals won by French athletes without mentioning those earned in multinational events (La Croix, 2014). In addition, there is a lack of interest in performances that do not focus on pure performance, as Thierry Zintz points out: "What is not part of pure performance, whether positive or negative, interests the media very little."

Nevertheless, some performances could have been highlighted, such as that of Emilie Morier, who won a bronze medal in the individual event and a gold medal in the relay with multinational teams, representing the French Triathlon Federation's first Olympic medal in this discipline (Trimag.fr, 2023). However, this performance was not reported by the national media. The same is true for Yoann Martinez, the first athlete to win a medal in short-track speed skating at the 2012 YOG in Innsbruck, and for Quentin Fercoq, who won the first gold medal in this discipline four years later at the 2016 YOG in Lillehammer. At the 2020 YOG in Lausanne, young French athletes won four medals in multinational ice hockey events (gold for Nathan Nicoud and Ludmila Bourcet, silver for Maël Halladj, and bronze for Hugo Galvez), but no article was published on this, even though three French athletes stood on the podium with three different medals.

Ultimately, it is evident that there are significant disparities in media coverage by the relevant French federations of medals won in multinational events. Indeed, few federations highlight their athletes' medals at the YOG, such as the French Archery Federation, which dedicated several small articles to the gold medal won by Kyla Thouraine-Hélias in the multinational team event. She is even featured in the "Our Medallists" category alongside Mélanie Gaubil (Youth Olympic vice-champion in Nanjing in 2014) and Jean-Charles Valadont (Olympic vice-champion in London in 2012). In contrast, other federations give more importance to individual performances, such as the French Fencing Federation, which highlighted Armand Spichiger's individual gold medal rather than his team gold. For many other French federations, YOG medals and results were simply not mentioned. Moreover, the same observation can be made regarding the lack of visibility of results by French athletes in junior and U23 competitions, which are often overshadowed by senior championships that bring more prestige to the athletes and their federations.

Although the YOG seem to serve as a springboard to the "real" Olympic Games, less than a quarter of YOG athletes later participate in the Summer Olympic competitions. This percentage is even lower for the Winter Olympic trajectories. This reinforces the idea that these multinational YOG events are seen more as iconoclastic, subordinate, fun, and playful competitions rather than as genuine springboards for future Olympic careers. A careful analysis of the website of the French National Olympic and Sports Committee (CNOSF), where all French athletes who have participated in the Olympic Games are listed, shows that only the editions of the Olympic Games are considered. Thus, in France, only performances at the iconic Olympic Games count, while the records of French athletes who participated in one of the six editions of the YOG remain ignored. In fact, in the CNOSF database listing all Olympians, only athletes who participated in the "real" Olympic Games have an individual file, and some, very rarely, mention medals won at the YOG. An analysis of the CNOSF press kit also shows that for the 2018 YOG, all French medallists appeared except those from multinational events. Worse still, the presentation of these YOG makes no mention of these multinational events, which inevitably contributes to their media anonymity. With one exception, that of Quentin Fercoq, a short-track speed skater, who is the only athlete to have an individual file referring to a medal won in a multinational event at the YOG. As for the recognition of athletes, it remains confidential and is always limited to a short period, that of the Olympic team's social media, which is fleeting, corresponding to the competition time or its brief aftermath. From this perspective, the testimonies of medallists who remain silent are very revealing in terms of demonstrating the low regard for their sporting achievements and their difficulties in obtaining a return on investment. According to Jolan Florimond: "Well, in fact, at the time, yes, because like any YOG event, when you win a medal, you are recognised, there's a whole media coverage on France Olympique, whether on social media, although at that time social media were a bit less developed than now. There was also some aftermath within the village, meaning that we had a post-event dinner where they called up all the different medallists, and we were given various gifts in relation to that medal. Therefore, all those who were present that day, there was really something. However, it is true that afterwards and during, it was not the case" (Florimond, 2023). As for Nathan Nicoud, the gold medallist in ice hockey at the 2020 Lausanne YOG, his observation revealed as much bitterness as humour: "First, the federation sent me a letter to congratulate me" (Nicoud, 2023).

In 2024, while the website presents the thirty key points of the Gangwon YOG, the 5th point announces that "for the first time at the Winter YOG, there will be no mixed National Olympic Committees (NOC) events, as they will be replaced by equivalent events in identical or similar formats with teams of athletes from the same NOCs" (Olympics.com, 2024). This decision marks a turning point in the design of Youth Olympic Games events, which must now be less playful and more competitive (Olympics.org, 2021). An interview with Christophe Dubi on the Francsjeux website also highlighted other obstacles that led to the removal of multinational events. He said: " They were complicated from a sporting standpoint. Not all athletes spoke the same language, selection was difficult, and the competition strategy was too complex. International federations and national Olympic committees found the exercise complex and not necessarily favourable to performance. The idea was to promote cultural diversity. However, we observe that it happens quite naturally within the village among young people from different delegations" (Francsjeux.com, 2024).

Ultimately, while the multinational events at the YOG allow young athletes to be able to win medals in emerging disciplines, these are presented and recognised very superficially in the media. One possible reason for this lack of interest is their identity specificity, as medals won in multinational events are primarily attributed to the "Olympic Movement" rather than to the National Olympic Committees, which inevitably limits their political and geopolitical importance. From this perspective, the disappearance of multinational events contributes to the resurgence of sporting nationalism (Gebauer, 1994) within the Olympic institution, while they had at least, during their existence, mitigated the negative effects of this ideology, which is in total disagreement with the Olympic ideal. Another reason, which remains a potential avenue for more rigorous investigation, is that athletes perceive these multinational competitions as moments of relaxation rather than important steps in their sporting and Olympic trajectories.

Their removal from the Olympic program of the 2024 Gangwon YOG is therefore not surprising, despite the many advantages of these unprecedented and unique events. However, their disappearance raises questions for anyone interested in Olympic values, particularly the universal dimensions of the Olympic ideal. By witnessing the end of this unprecedented innovation, the disappearance of podiums gathering 6, 12, or 39 athletes from different NOCs, where the Olympic flag is celebrated and the Olympic anthem resonates in the stadium, it is a whole set of symbols and values that seems to be

called into question at the turn of the 21st century, a century after the bold initiatives of Pierre de Coubertin (Clastres 2013).

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the French media's interest in plurinational events at the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) reveals a significant evolution since 2010. Before this date, which marked the first edition of these events at the YOG, the French press paid relatively little attention to them or was even timid because of the lack of direct Olympic recognition and limited international media coverage. However, there was a shift in the perception of these events between 2010 and 2020. During the second decade of the 21st century, the remarkable performances of young French athletes increasingly captured the interest of local and regional media, while the major national general and sports newspapers gave them little more than a quiet acknowledgement of their innovation.

Additionally, the absence of national flags and anthems in favour of the Olympic flag and anthem during the specific protocols of these events significantly limited media exposure beyond regional borders.

Although the YOG are primarily seen as a preliminary stage for future Olympic athletes, the results achieved have been slow to be recognised in France, particularly by the CNOSF, as high-level performance. Between 2010 and 2020, however, these events played a crucial role in affirming nations that were previously invisible in the Olympic standings and promoting diversity and inclusion within the Olympic movement. By allowing a significant number of athletes to win their first Olympic medal, plurinational events contributed, to the extent possible, to redefining the geopolitical balance of the Olympic Movement by highlighting new talents worldwide. However, the disappearance of these events after 2020 highlights the ongoing challenges of promoting international participation and inclusion in sports, despite the continued support of Olympic Solidarity actors.

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