



REPORT ON RULE 50 QUESTIONNAIRE

Position of the French athletes on Rule 50

February 2021

Number of athletes who received questionnaire by email: 2,110

Number of responses: 320

GENERAL

The substantial majority of athletes who responded to the questionnaire knew that there were guidelines in place relating to freedom of expression at the Olympic Games: 57% said “Yes”, and 25% “I think so”.

There were still 18% of athletes who were not aware that this was the case.

One-third of respondents found it “surprising” that such guidelines were in place, whereas only 7% thought it was “unjustifiable”. Conversely, 42% said it was “reassuring”.

More generally for major championships, 66% thought that there should be guidelines on where athletes can express their opinions (rather than being able to do so “anywhere”); and virtually the same proportion thought there should be guidelines on *how* athletes can express opinions (rather than being able to do so “however they feel like”).

TERMS AND MEANINGS

When we went into more detail about the terms used in the Rule and what they mean, there was quite a significant lack of understanding.

The term “demonstration” was perfectly clear for 62% of respondents, whereas this wasn’t the case for the rest.

The term “propaganda” was perfectly clear for 70% of those asked but unclear for the others.

The term “protest” was “not” or “not at all” clear for 49% of respondents.

When respondents were presented with a hypothetical opportunity to express an opinion or defend a cause, there was a clear tendency towards doing so for a “social” cause (82%).

Religious and political causes only met with a combined 12% of favourable opinions. Those who selected “other” mentioned environmental, sports and social justice issues, which can be grouped together with social causes and would therefore add an additional 6% onto the initial 82%. The same clear sentiments against religious and/or political protests could be seen when athletes were asked what they would be prepared to accept from another athlete in places where Rule 50 currently applies. It should be noted, however, that almost 40% would be prepared to accept a social protest, and 21% even said that they would be prepared to follow the lead of the athlete protesting.

It is also worth noting that a considerable number of respondents, 20%, said that they would feel their moment had been ruined in the event of a protest, of whatever kind, by another athlete. When expressly asked whether athletes should be able to express a religious opinion, only 10% said yes, compared to 17% for a political opinion. On the other hand, 74%, i.e. almost three-quarters, were in favour of authorising the expression of opinions related to social issues.

PLACE

In response to the question about the places where athletes should be authorised to express their views in general, the vast majority of respondents – 80% – said digital and traditional media, mixed zones and press conferences, i.e. the places where this is already authorised. However, it should be noted that 49% were also in favour of this being extended to designated zones within the Olympic Village.

BYE-LAW

Although, as we mentioned at the start of this summary, 82% of those asked were aware (or thought they were aware) of the existence of Rule 50, it was surprising to see that 64% did not know about the Bye-law to the Rule, and a further 16% were “uncertain”, meaning that ultimately only 20% of athletes were fully aware of the existence of a Bye-law that elaborates on Rule 50.

SANCTIONS

Almost half of the athletes who took part in the questionnaire did not know that they could be sanctioned if they failed to comply with Rule 50.

With regard to sanctions that have been imposed in the past for failing to comply with Rule 50, 20% of respondents felt that they did not have enough knowledge of what sanctions had been applied to assess how appropriate they were. A range of conflicting terms were chosen in the remaining responses, producing no identifiable trend. Having read an extract from the Bye-law, 87% of athletes fully understood the sporting consequences they would face if in breach of Rule 50.

CONCLUSION

There was broad support for the idea of a wider framework that would encompass social causes. On the other hand, there was a clear position against authorising athletes to defend political or religious causes.

The findings on athletes' proper comprehension of the terms used in Rule 50, coupled with the large percentage of athletes who did not know about the Bye-law, would suggest that a clear redefinition is required. Compliance with this Rule by Olympians is dependent on a proper understanding of the scope of their actions, particularly given the serious sporting consequences of failure to comply with the Rule.

There appears to be no clear, unequivocal position with regard to changing Rule 50. A substantial proportion of respondents – 44% – did not feel they were sufficiently well informed about the matter to give an opinion. Nevertheless, 30% of athletes wanted the Rule to be amended; 17% were against any modification of the Rule; while 5% wanted to see it abolished altogether.