



# The popularity of winter sports in Russia according to television broadcasts of the 2018 and 2022 Olympic winter games

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## Abstract

**Objective of the study** was to identify the most popular winter sports in Russia based on television broadcasts of the 2018 and 2022 Olympic Winter Games. on public Russian state television channels.

**Methods and structure of the study.** The study included an analysis and synthesis of data from specialized and scientific-methodological literature, as well as a comparison of the main indicators of sports television broadcasts.

**Results and conclusions.** Largely thanks to the interaction of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) with television, the Olympic Games (OG) have become the main sporting event in the world and a global phenomenon, and television has become one of the key partners of sports, providing its financing by purchasing rights to television broadcasts and displaying television advertising of sponsors, providing financial support to sports. Athletes of the USSR, and then Russia, won more than 80% of all medals won at the Olympic Winter Games (OSG) in competitions in cross-country skiing, speed skating, figure skating, biathlon and hockey. It has been established that it is competitions in these sports that have the highest ratings and arouse increased interest among television viewers on state Russian television channels when broadcasting the 2018 and 2022 Olympic Winter Games.

**Keywords:** winter sports, Olympic winter games, Russian television, TV broadcast ratings.

**Introduction.** Pursuant to Rule 7 of the Olympic Charter [1], the IOC owns all rights and information relating to the modern Olympic Games (OG) and has sole control over the use of the Olympic base television signal. The rights to televise Olympic competitions were first sold to SBC at the 1960 Olympic Winter Games (OWG-60). This event became a turning point in the history of modern Olympic Games, as television turned sport into a commodity, the value of which increased sharply after the admission of professionals to the Olympic Games [2-4].

In the USSR, television broadcasts of international competitions at the level of Olympic Games, Olympic Games, World and European Championships were carried out on the first state television channel, the signal of which most fully covered the territory of the state. Due to the lack of data on television broadcast

indicators at that time, it is difficult to judge which sports were a priority for Soviet television viewers. But it can be assumed that in the winter the most popular were television broadcasts with the participation of the Soviet hockey team, as well as performances by figure skaters, cross-country skiers, biathletes and speed skaters.

After the USSR ceased to exist in 1991, sports on Russian television almost disappeared and only at the beginning of the 21st century gradually began to return to television screens. First, the 7 TV channel was able to see the Biathlon World Cup competitions, and later the Sport and Russia-2 television channels began broadcasting competitions in various sports. In 2015, the state sports channel «Match!TV» was created, which broadcasts many international and Russian sports competitions. Thanks to this TV channel, the



leading positions in the winter competitive seasons in Russia are occupied by the ratings of biathlon television broadcasts [5].

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**Results of the study and discussion.** In Russia, television broadcasts of all competitions at OWG-18 and OWG-22 were carried out by leading state (federal) TV channels: «Channel One», «Russia-1» and «Match!TV» (hereinafter referred to as «First», «Russia» and «Match»). Broadcasts in the most successful sports, namely hockey, figure skating, biathlon and cross-country skiing, were shared by the country's two main channels – «First» and «Russia».

Today, there are technologies that can determine television broadcast indicators, which may indicate

the interest of television viewers in various programs and broadcasts, including sports. Therefore, when determining the popularity of winter sports on Russian television during OWG-18 and OWG-22, data from the technological research company Mediascop was used. Studies of television content were carried out in cities of the Russian Federation with a population of 100 thousand or more, and the studied audience was a population of four years and older. In our case, the rating and the share of television broadcast were taken into account. The rating was determined as the ratio of the number of television viewers watching a particular program to the total population of the country; and the share is the ratio of the number of television viewers watching a broadcast to the entire television audience at the moment [6].

Mediascop weekly ranks television programs, both in various areas (news, sports, entertainment, children's, educational, etc.), and in the category «100 most popular programs among Russians aged 4 years and older» (hereinafter referred to as TV-100), which takes into account the indicators of all television programs on 23 federal television channels.

Table 1. Indicators of TOP-12 television broadcasts from OWG-18 and OWG-22

Date	Type of sport	Competitive discipline	TV channel	r.(%)	d.(%)
<b>OWG-18</b>					
25.02	Hockey	Men. OAR – Germany	First	12,8	52,3
23.02	Hockey	Men. OAR – USA	Russia	8,7	29,7
17.02	Hockey	Men. OAR – Czech Republic	Russia	7,4	27,6
25.02	Ski race	Women. Mass Start	First	5,3	20,7
23.02	Figure skating	Women. Free program	Russia	4,8	18,4
24.02	Snowboarding	Women. Parallel slalom	First	3,6	15,9
11.02	Figure skating	Women. Com. tour. Cor. prog.	Russia	3,6	15,6
10.02	Speed skating	Women. 3000 m.	First	3,6	13,9
11.02	Figure skating	Sp. couples. Com. tour. Free prog.	Russia	3,6	12,8
18.02	Ski race	Men. Relay race	First	3,5	16,9
13.02	Ski race	Men. Sprint	Russia	3,3	17,7
11.02	Ski race	Men. Skiathlon	Russia	3,3	17,7
<b>OWG-22</b>					
15.02	Figure skating	Women. Short program	First	7,1	35,3
17.02	Figure skating	Women. Free program	Russia	6,7	35,1
13.02	Biathlon	Women. Pursuit	First	5,9	24,8
13.02	Ski race	Men. Relay race	First	5,6	26,1
19.02	Figure skating	Sp. couples. Free program	Russia	5,6	24,5
18.02	Hockey	Men. ROC - Sweden	Russia	5,2	23,2
20.02	Hockey	Men. Finland – OKR	First	5,1	37,5
5.02	Biathlon	Mixed relay	First	4,8	21,8
18.02	Figure skating	Sp. couples. Short program	First	4,7	24,4
6.02	Ski race	Men. Skiathlon	First	4,5	22,8
19.02	Ski race	Men. Mass Start	Russia	4,3	22,8
7.02	Figure skating	Women. Com. tour. Free program	First	4,3	13,6



Table 1 presents data from the 12 most rated television broadcasts (TOP-12) from OWG -18 (Pyeongchang, South Korea) and OWG-22 (Beijing, China).

The maximum broadcast ratings on two OWG were recorded in three matches of the OWG-18 hockey tournament with the participation of Russians, and the absolute values: rating – 12,8% and share – 52,3% were in the victorious final, which was held on the last day and where the last set of awards for OWG-18. Against the backdrop of unsuccessful performances in other sports (only one gold in figure skating competitions), the whole country was waiting for this victory of Russian hockey players, united in front of television screens. In addition to hockey, the TOP-12 at OWG-18 included broadcasts in cross-country skiing - 4, in figure skating - 3, and one each in snowboarding and speed skating. In five cases, TV ratings were above 4%, and in seven – in the range from 3,3 to 3,6%.

At OWG-22, the maximum ratings were recorded in women’s figure skating competitions, and TOP-12 included broadcasts in the following sports: figure skating - 5, cross-country skiing - 3, biathlon and hockey - two each. Ratings ranged from 4.3 to 7,1%, which is significantly higher than at OWG-18 (with the exception of the games of the Russian hockey team), which may indicate an increase in fan interest in the performances of Russian athletes at OWG-22.

Now lets look at how the successes of Russian athletes in various sports influenced the indicators of television broadcasts. The OWG-18 and OWG-22 programs included competitions in 15 sports, in

which 102 and 109 sets of awards were awarded. According to the results of OWG-22, Russian athletes performed better than four years ago, winning 32 awards and losing only to Norway (37 medals). Medal achievements of Russian athletes and the number of broadcasts included in TV-100 in each sport are presented in table. 2.

Table data 2 indicate a direct relationship between the medal achievements of Russians in various sports and the number of television broadcasts in these sports included in TV-100. Thus, at the OWG-18, Russian athletes successfully performed in hockey, figure skating, cross-country skiing and freestyle skiing, and, as a result, broadcasts of Olympic competitions in these sports (as well as in biathlon and short track) had high indicators, which means that sports were of interest to television viewers in Russia. Of all 53 broadcasts included in TV-100, 48 (or almost 91%) are from these six sports.

At OWG-22, the Russians performed most successfully in cross-country skiing, figure skating and biathlon. Therefore, television broadcasts in these sports (12, 13 and 10 respectively), as well as in hockey, short track and freestyle (8, 6 and 4) accounted for 53 (or 81%) of all 65 television broadcasts that were included in TV- 100 according to the results of OWG-22.

**Conclusions.** Live broadcast of Olympic competitions on federal Russian television channels revealed an increase in the number of television broadcasts that are included in the «100 most popular programs»

Table 2. Medals of Russian athletes and the number of broadcasts included in TV-100 in each sport at OWG-18 and OWG-22

Types of sports	OWG-18					OWG-22				
	I	II	III	Σ	TV	I	II	III	Σ	TV
Ski race	---	3	5	8	9	4	4	3	11	12
Figure skating	1	2	---	3	21	2	3	1	6	13
Biathlon	---	---	---	---	5	---	1	3	4	10
Skating	---	---	1	1	1	---	1	1	2	3
Short track	---	---	1	1	4	---	1	1	2	6
Hockey	1	---	---	1	5	---	1	---	1	8
Ski jumping	---	---	---	---	---	---	1	---	1	3
Freestyle	---	---	2	2	4	---	---	3	3	4
Luge	---	---	---	---	1	---	---	1	1	3
Snowboarding	---	---	---	---	2	---	---	1	1	---
Curling	---	---	---	---	1	---	---	---	---	2
Skeleton	---	1	---	1	---	---	---	---	---	---
Nordic combined	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	1
Skiing	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Bobsled	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>65</b>



- from 53 on OWG-18 to 65 on OWG-22. Of these 118 television broadcasts, 83 (or 70%) are for four sports: figure skating – 34, cross-country skiing – 21, biathlon – 15 and hockey – 13. The remaining 35 television broadcasts are for eight sports: short track speed skating – 10, freestyle – 8, speed skating and luge – 4 each, ski jumping and curling – 3 each, snowboarding – 2 and Nordic combined – 1. Television broadcasts of bobsleigh, skeleton and alpine skiing were not included in TV-100.

The TOP-12 television broadcasts from the last two Olympic Games on state Russian television channels included: figure skating – 8, cross-country skiing – 7, hockey – 5, biathlon – 2, snowboarding and speed skating – one each. The maximum TV ratings were recorded at OWG-18 in the final of the hockey tournament between Russia and Germany: rating – 12,8% and share – 53,2%. These figures are significantly higher than those of the highest-rated broadcast of figure skater competitions in the short program with OWG-22: rating – 7,1% and share – 35,3%.

Currently, television ratings are the main criteria for the success or failure of certain sports competitions and the popularity of sports. TV broadcasts of OWG-18 and OWG-22 give grounds to assert that increased

interest and popularity on public Russian state television channels is caused by the performances of domestic athletes in cross-country skiing, figure skating, hockey and biathlon.

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