

# Analysis of the institutional consequences of the isolation of Russian sport at the international level in the period 2022–2025

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## Abstract

**Objective of the study** is to analyze the institutional consequences of the international isolation of Russian sport in 2022–2025, including the scope of restrictions, conditions for the admission of neutral athletes, organizational measures to overcome isolation, and the development of directions for the strategic institutional development of the sports system.

**Methods and structure of the study.** The methodological study is based on the principles of institutional analysis and a systematic approach. The following methods were used: content analysis (of normative acts and documents of the IOC, FIFA, FIG, and the Ministry of Sport of the Russian Federation); comparative historical analysis (by stages: 2022, 2023, 2024); expert evaluation of publications in the scientific and business press.

**Results and conclusions.** International isolation was not only competitive in nature, but also political and organizational, including the suspension of membership of organizations, cancellation of tournament participation, postponement of events, and exclusion from rankings. The partial admission of individual athletes under AIN (Authorized Individual Neutral) status was a formal compromise, but in fact only cemented institutional isolation for the long term.

Russia's adaptation strategies included restarting the national calendar, launching alternative formats (BRICS Games, Friendship Games), restructuring the reserve and developing the domestic competitive environment. The author concludes that a model of autonomous sports management has emerged, accompanied by risks of losing international competitiveness, distorting competitive motivation and limiting access to global standards.

**Keywords:** *international isolation, Russian Federation, neutral status, International Olympic Committee, sports.*

**Introduction.** Modern sport is not only a competitive system, but also a socio-political one, closely linked to international regulation, diplomacy, law and the media. Over the past decade, the Russian Federation has maintained a stable position in the global sporting structure, demonstrating high results and active participation in international organizations. Since 2022, under the influence of geopolitical tensions and subsequent decisions by international institutions, the Russian sports community has found itself in a state of unprecedented isolation. Following the official recommendations of the International Olympic Committee on 28 February 2022 [4], more than 30 international federations introduced measures restricting the par-

ticipation of Russian athletes, teams and sports organizations in competitions, international structures and ranking systems [8]. Scientific interest in the topic of the international isolation of Russian sport has increased significantly since 2022. A number of publications have focused on the political and legal grounds for sanctions, the violation of athletes' rights and the influence of geopolitical factors on the sports sphere.

The legal mechanisms for restricting access to competitions, the status of neutral athletes, and the consequences for Russia's international reputation were also examined. The concept of 'sports sovereignty' was considered in the context of refusing to participate in institutions controlled by Western struc-



tures. However, despite the significance of these areas, the question of internal institutional consequences remains insufficiently explored: what adaptation mechanisms are being implemented at the level of the national calendar, reserves and federal management, and how is the model of autonomous sports functioning being formed?

This study fills this gap by offering a comprehensive overview of the key areas of internal institutional adaptation of the Russian sports system in the context of prolonged international isolation.

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The source base consists of: official documents from the IOC, CAS, and federations; analytical materials from the Ministry of Sport of the Russian Federation and the ROC; academic research in the field of sports law and management; reports on the conduct of alternative competitions.

**Results of the study and discussion.** By 2023, sanctions had been imposed on more than 30 sports. Most international federations refused to admit Russian national teams. Particularly harsh measures were introduced in team sports (football, basketball, hockey). Russian referees, officials and coaches were also excluded from international judging panels and registers, which deprived them of the right to participate in competitions under the auspices of international federations. In 2023, the IOC introduced the concept of a 'neutral individual athlete' – AIN [5].

Admission became possible only in individual sports and subject to a number of political and ethical requirements, including the absence of support for the SMO and an agreement with the international federation. This decision was criticized by sports and legal experts [9].

An analysis by sport (see Table 1) shows varying levels of isolation: from a complete ban on participation (football, hockey, volleyball) to limited admission under neutral status (gymnastics, wrestling, tennis). The greatest concessions were made to individual Olympic disciplines with a developed system of commercial tournaments. At the same time, a number of sports – athletics, luge, boxing – remain subject to strict restrictions, depriving athletes of international competitive experience.

Table 1. Subjects

Sport	Qualification	Gender, number of subjects, n	Age, years	Body length, cm	Body weight, kg
Cycling (track sprint)	HMS MSMK	M (n=6)	26±3	176±3,5	85,3±7,6
BMX cycling	MSMK MS	M (n=12)	23±4	182,4±6,3	81,0±5,5
		Ж (n=9)	22±5	164,4±3,8	62,3±7,7
Cross-country skiing	HMS MS of International Class MS	M (n=10)	23±4	179,8±6,2	72,5±6,7
		Ж (n=27)	17,7±4	168,0±3,4	60,6±4,7
Skating	HMS MS of International Class MS	M (n=37)	24±6	182,1±5,2	79,2±6,9
		Ж (n=33)	23±7	169,0±6,1	63,3±7,7
Rowing academic	MSMK MS	M (n=30)	22±6	192,3±8,2	89,2±11,2
Football	U16	M (n=51)	16±1	177,9±7,0	71,4±1,3



Table 1. Main restrictions by sport (2022–2024)

Type of sport	2022	2023	2024	Admission to AIN
Athletics	✘	✘	✘	No
Football	✘	✘	✘	Only U-17
Wrestling	✘	▲	▲	Yes
Gymnastics	✘	▲	▲	Yes
Hockey	✘	✘	✘	No
Swimming	✘	▲	▲	Yes
Figure skating	✘	▲	▲	Yes
Biathlon	✘	✘	✘	No
Tennis	▲	▲	▲	Yes
Volleyball	✘	✘	✘	No
Basketball	✘	✘	✘	No
Chess	▲	▲	▲	Yes
Fencing	✘	▲	▲	Yes
Karate	✘	▲	▲	Yes
Weightlifting	✘	▲	▲	Yes
Boxing	▲	▲	▲	No
Luge	✘	✘	✘	No
Rowing	✘	▲	▲	Yes
Speed skating	✘	✘	▲	Yes
Triathlon	✘	▲	▲	Yes

(\* ✘ – prohibition; ▲ – partial admission \*)

The isolation was accompanied by the postponement of world championships, the cancellation of Cup stages, exclusion from rankings and the loss of licenses. In response, the Russian Ministry of Sport and the ROC took systematic steps to reorient the calendar: in 2023–2024, the BRICS Games, Friendship Games, and international championships were created on the territory of the Russian Federation [6, 10]. The participation of Asian and CIS countries was also intensified. At the federation level, internal ratings have been introduced, stimulating grants for juniors, and the standards for domestic competitions have been raised. Some federations (swimming, wrestling) have proposed a system of domestic cups with open participation [1].

The key risk remains the limitation of contacts with the strongest international schools. This reduces the level of training, the motivation of athletes and complicates the development of reserves. Thus, the Russian sports system has moved into a mode of autonomous mobilization [3], in which the main task is not to win on the world stage, but to preserve personnel, organizational and methodological potential in conditions of external blockade.

The international restrictions imposed on Russian sport in 2022–2024 were of varying degrees, ranging from a complete ban on participation to the admission of individual athletes under neutral AIN status [5]. This segmentation of restrictions has led to an uneven impact on sports and an institutional burden on the national sports system.

An analysis of the response of Russian organizations showed that sports institutions implemented a set of adaptive measures: from creating alternative international competitions to mobilizing internal selection and ranking mechanisms [1, 6, 10]. These steps partially compensated for the consequences of isolation, but did not remove the key barriers to full international integration.

In the context of continuing isolation, a model of autonomous institutional mobilization began to take shape [3], based on strengthening internal organizational resources and reorienting strategic priorities. The following areas of institutional development can be identified: digitalization of management and training of athletes through the creation of national platforms for monitoring, analytics and regulatory control [11]; the development of sports diplomacy outside the framework of traditional international structures, based on coordination mechanisms for interaction with the federations of the BRICS countries, the CIS and the Global South [7]; and strengthening the scientific and methodological support for high-performance sport through the establishment of specialized centers of excellence, the introduction of independent evaluation of methodologies and the creation of domestic scientific platforms [2].

**Conclusions.** The institutional model that has been formed does not exclude external vulnerability, but sets a vector for sustainable autonomy focused on long-term development in conditions of limited international interaction.

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