

FAIRPLAY

SPORT FOR FAIR, EQUAL AND INCLUSIVE WORLD

Sport and Human Rights

Overview
July-September 2023

Content

Introduction	1
What's wrong with human rights in sport in Belarus?	3
Gender equality in sport	6
Women rights in sport	9
Sexual harassment in sport	14
Safety, security and service during sport events	16
War and sport	18
Other human rights violations in sport	20
Conclusion	23

List of Abbre

ECHR - European Court of Human Rights

FAZ – Football Federation of Zambia

FIA – Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile

FIFA – Fédération Internationale de Football Association

FIFPRO – Fédération Internationale des Associations de Footballeurs Professionnels

FRF – Federația Română de Fotbal

HFF – Hellenic Football Federation

IOC – International Olympic Committee

LFP – Ligue de Football Professionnel

NCAA – National Collegiate Athletic Association

NFF – Nigeria Foot Federation

RFU – Russian Football Union

SAFA – South African Football Association

SAFPU – South African Football Players Union

UAF – Ukrainian Association of Football

UEFA – Union of European Football Associations

UN – United Nations Organisation

USSF – United States Soccer Federation

WADA – World Anti-Doping Agency

Introduction

In the report for July-September 2023, we examined the most significant events and news in sport through the prism of international human rights standards.

In Belarus, detentions of the sport industry representatives continue for a variety of reasons: aiding extremist activities, participating in peaceful protests after the 2020 presidential elections, support for Ukraine, and condemnation of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, among others, constituting a violation of various human rights. The question of allowing Belarusian and Russian athletes to participate in international competitions remains relevant.

During the analysed period, several important events related to gender equality in sport occurred. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) strengthened the protection of the rights of intersex individuals in sport, including their right to non-discrimination and physical integrity. The first-ever open competitive category for transgender athletes was introduced, and efforts are being made in the world of sport to promote women's football.

From July to August 2023, one of the most anticipated sporting events of the summer took place — the Women's World Cup. Despite the prize fund this year being three times higher than the previous World Cup, it is still four times less than the total prize money for the men's tournament, as well as the pay in women's football worldwide. Women in all sports still face inequality in pay and working conditions, as well as other human rights violations. In the analysis, we examined examples of women's struggle against inequality and shared the successes they have achieved.

Sexual harassment is another current issue in women's sport, affecting fundamental principles of equality, dignity, and non-discrimination. The most prominent scandal during the analysed period was an unwanted kiss between the President of the Spanish Football Federation, Luis Rubiales, and footballer Jennifer Hermoso after Spain's victory in the World Cup.

During the analysed period, several incidents related to the activities of football fans occurred — from political statements in stadiums to a tragedy resulting in the death of one of the fans. These events remind us of the need to involve all stakeholders in ensuring safety at sports events.

In our material, we also examined news on topics such as Russia's war against Ukraine, the right to health, issues of toxicity and homophobic remarks in the football environment, and more.

**What's wrong with human rights
in sport in Belarus?**

The latest wave of arrests occurred at FC Neman. The coach Dzmitry Belski and the administrator Julia Arlashina of the sports school (СДЮШОР) were detained. They were forced to record a so-called “repentance video”, published in a Telegram channel, in which the employees stated that they were arrested for subscribing to “extremist” resources. The video also contained the caption: “Neman is confidently moving towards the Conference League because the law enforcement officers are clearing the club of the White-Red-White mould”. In our previous report, we shared the news of the arrest of Dzmitry Kovalyonak in June, who was also compelled to record a “repentance video”. Both incidents violate the right to be free from degrading treatment and freedom of expression and require attention and assessment from UEFA. It is worth noting that UEFA considers the principle of respecting human rights as one of the fundamental principles of its work, and they claim to strive to ensure a safe and fair access to the game, as well as a safe and inclusive working environment in football.

Artur Mustyhin, coach of the FC Dinamo-Minsk Academy, was arrested for participating in peaceful protests after the 2020 presidential elections. He was also forced to record a “repentance video” in which Mustyhin stated that he participated in a protest after the 2020 elections and sent information to the “Voice” initiative’s chatbot. Now, the coach is facing criminal charges.

A trial took place for the chess champion of Gomel, Valery Jarotski. The athlete was accused of defamation under Article 188 and defamation against the president under part 2 of Article 367 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus. Jarotski was sent to compulsory treatment in a psychiatric hospital. The athlete also ended up in the “List of citizens of the Republic of Belarus, foreign citizens or stateless persons involved in extremist activities”, which currently includes 3520 individuals.

Long distance runner Andrej Bierazouski was sentenced to 13 days of arrest. The athlete posted a photo on his Facebook page with the caption “Glory to Ukraine” on a blue and yellow background, which was interpreted as an “expression of civil, political, personal and other interests” and deemed an “offence” by the court.

Sport blogger Dzmitry Sielviestruk faced criminal prosecution for “assisting extremist activities”. Sielviestruk is a former employee of the newspaper “Narodnaya Gazeta” and ran his Telegram channel “Silver age. Football of Belarus”, where he published analytical materials on Belarusian football. Sielviestruk was arrested in early May, but the circumstances of the criminal case are still unknown. The blogger may face up to 6 years in prison.

Bodybuilder Aliaksandr Sharabaiko was sentenced to 1.5 years in prison for “insulting the president”. Sharabaiko participated in peaceful protests in Belarus in 2020, for which he repeatedly received administrative arrests. The bodybuilder was detained in March 2023 and initially received 10 days of arrest for “spreading extremist materials”. Later, he was transferred to a pre-trial detention centre, where he was charged and a criminal case was initiated against him.

The aforementioned events indicate ongoing serious violations of human rights in Belarus: the right of peaceful assembly, freedom of expression, and freedom from degrading treatment. De facto authorities in Belarus continue to persecute dissenting representatives of the sport industry and deprive them of the right to practise their profession.

The International Swimming Federation (World Aquatics) has adopted a set of criteria allowing athletes with Belarusian and Russian sport citizenship to participate in international competitions in a neutral status. The document, which came into force on September 4, 2023, states that athletes and their support personnel from Belarus and Russia can compete in all World Aquatics disciplines if they:

- Adhere to all World Aquatics rules;
- Do not have a contract with Belarusian or Russian military or other national security entities;
- Do not support the war in Ukraine in any form;
- Adhere to anti-doping rules.

Upon receiving a neutral status during competitions, athletes are prohibited from using flags, anthems of Belarus and Russia, or any other distinctive symbols; the attire of athletes and support personnel must be white and approved by World Aquatics; athletes and their support personnel are prohibited from giving interviews to the media. In each discipline of World Aquatics competitions, only one athlete with Belarusian or Russian citizenship may enter (which deprives athletes of the opportunity to participate in synchronised swimming (duet and group) and synchronised diving). The document was adopted in accordance with the recommendations of the IOC dated March 28, 2023.

The conditions set by World Aquatics are transparent and compromise during Russia's military actions in Ukraine, providing a real opportunity for athletes from Belarus and Russia to participate in competitions. However, as before, Russian representatives of the sport industry reacted extremely negatively to the offered conditions: the head coach of the Russian national diving team, Svetlana Moiseeva, called them “complete discrimination”, and two-time Olympic diving champion Dmitry Sautin described them a “silent horror”. Olympic champion and Russian MP Svetlana Zhurova stated that synchronised swimming is “part of Russian culture”, a “cultural code”, and thus, World Aquatics wants to ban Russian culture. Such a position by the Russian authorities and de facto authorities in Belarus could lead to athletes from these countries being completely deprived of the opportunity to participate in international competitions.

Gender equality in sport

Caster Semenya won her case in the ECHR related to the eligibility of athletes with elevated testosterone levels. The court determined that there was a violation of the prohibition of discrimination (Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights) and the right to respect for private life (Article 8 of the Convention). Additionally, a violation of the right to an effective remedy (Article 13 of the Convention) was established concerning Article 14 in conjunction with Article 8 of the Convention. Both of these violations are linked to the “lack of sufficient institutional and procedural guarantees in Switzerland to allow for the effective examination of [Semenya's] complaints, especially since her complaints concerned well-founded and credible allegations of discrimination.” Despite the court's decision being based on the absence of procedural and institutional means of protection against discrimination, it signals that the rights of intersex individuals in sports, including their right to non-discrimination and physical integrity, are protected by the ECHR.

At the Swimming World Cup, scheduled for October 6-8,2023, in Berlin, an open category with the participation of transgender athletes will be introduced for the first time. Detailed information about the requirements for participants in the competition will be published soon, as stated on the World Aquatics website. World Aquatics previously updated its Participation Policy for male and female competitive categories. World Aquatics became the first international sport federation to adopt a document on gender equality. In our article “Gender in Professional Sports: Is there Fair Play beyond the Gender Binary?”, we have discussed that besides testosterone levels, various factors such as training conditions, funding, access to resources, and the exclusion of athletes with differences of sex development (DSD), non-binary, and transgender athletes constitute a violation of the right to freedom from discrimination.

Video game publisher EA Sports is releasing a football simulator under the tag FC 24 this year, marking their first release in the genre after discontinuing cooperation with FIFA in the gaming sector. The game features the Ultimate Team mode, where players build their own teams from athletes of different clubs. This mode is the most popular and forms the basis of the esports component of the EA Sports FC football video game franchise. Starting this year, female footballers will be available in the Ultimate Team mode, allowing the creation of mixed-gender teams.

This news has received a mixed reaction among users. Critics argue that "the female players are not at the same level as their male counterparts, and should not be given similar ratings as they cannot realistically compete with the men." The opposing argument is that women's sports deserve more recognition, and this is the first step toward increasing the popularity and acknowledgment of the female side of the game in the gaming industry. EA Sports stated that “the developers felt strongly about using their game to promote women’s football” and that the company will “use new technologies to combat toxic online behaviour,” which they expect in various forms after the release of FC 24.

Esports has gained immense popularity in recent decades. However, toxicity and sexism are two of the most prevalent and characteristic problems in the world of esports. Discrimination, insults, and unsportsmanlike behaviour are often encountered in this sport. The competitive environment can undoubtedly contribute to increased toxicity, as players, like any other athletes, often experience strong stress, disappointment, and pressure. Also, the lack of necessary rule enforcement in esports creates a conducive environment for unsportsmanlike behaviour. Despite research indicating that the percentage of male and female players in gaming is almost equal, esports is traditionally considered a male-dominated sport, leading to unequal treatment and opportunities for professional female players — unequal pay, harassment, and objectification.

Women rights in sport

In 2023, there are still news stories with headlines narrating women achieving something “for the first time in history,” including in the sport industry. Our material provides examples of such news during the analysed period.

Hannah Dingley entered history as the first woman to hold the position of head coach for a professional English men's team. Sarina Wiegman was the sole coach in the quarterfinals of the Women's FIFA World Cup. Haley Van Voorhis became the first female football player to take the field in a non-kicker position in an NCAA football match. Sophia Floersch became the first woman to score points in FIA Formula 3. Joy Neville will also enter history as the first female referee at the 2023 Men's Rugby World Cup. Nouhaila Benzina, a Moroccan footballer, became the first player to wear a hijab in the Women's FIFA World Cup. Following this, EA Sports added an update to the FIFA 23 video game, featuring the model wearing a hijab.

Such news undoubtedly highlights the successes women achieve in the world of sports, but at the same time, it indicates the problems they face. The fact that women are still “trailblazers” in some areas underscores persisting gender inequality, including in the sport sphere. Reasons for this problem include insufficient representation of women in key roles and positions, social norms and expectations, and stereotypes. Women overcoming these barriers can become role models and inspire new generations to bring about systematic changes, making such “first achievements” the norm rather than the exception.

An example of promoting equality and inclusion is the joint tour by Levi's and FC St. Pauli in the UK, “Football Has No Gender,” supporting gender equality in football. Three friendly matches were held during the tour. After the first match, representatives of FC St. Pauli and Clapton Community FC met for a panel discussion to address issues hindering equality promotion. Topics included the lack of visibility of women's football in the media, the need to “learn from the mistakes” of men's football, particularly avoiding being “profit-driven.” Accessibility of grassroots football and diversity in women's play were also discussed. Participants aimed to draw attention to the women's team, women's football, and give impetus to women's play.

One of the most significant events in sports during the analysed period is undoubtedly the 2023 Women's FIFA World Cup, which became the most successful in its history. In our material, we will discuss the most significant events that occurred during the tournament from a human rights perspective.

Despite changes to some tournament conditions by the start of the Women's FIFA World Cup, such as a threefold increase in total prize money, individual teams continue to face issues related to wage disparities.

The South African women's national team boycotted their friendly match with Botswana due to disputes over wage payment. The match was supposed to prepare the team for the tournament and serve as a farewell before participating in the World Cup. Because of the boycott by South African players, the coach Desiree Ellis had to

assemble an improvised team, including a 13-year-old player. There were no comments from the coach regarding the absence of the team on the field. Thulaganyo Gaoshubelwe, president of SAFPU, expressed support for the players, stating that it is necessary to fight for their rights. Sportswomen reported a lack of transparency in the contract signing process with SAFA. They were also dissatisfied with the stadium where their match was held before the tournament, as its surface consisted of clay and grass, increasing the risk of injuries. Moreover, the stadium could accommodate a maximum of 5000 spectators, which, according to the players, did not correspond to the team's level of success. One of the representatives of SAFA called the players “mercenaries” and “traitors.” South African Minister of Sports Zizi Kodwa proposed a meeting with SAFA and SAFPU to address the situation.

The Nigerian national team arrived at the World Cup on the brink of boycotting matches due to wage payment issues with the NFF: some players had not been paid salaries for two years. During the World Cup, the players decided to focus on their game without making public statements about this issue. However, immediately after the team's participation in the tournament, FIFPRO issued an official statement expressing support for the players and took control of ensuring NFF's wage payment commitments. Although FIFA increased the total prize money this year and will allocate funds separately for federations and players (each player is expected to receive a minimum of \$30,000), the money will still be routed through federations. This does not instil confidence in athletes from countries like Nigeria, where transparency issues exist, that they will receive their earnings.

During this World Cup, the U.S. women's national team received strong support from the U.S. men's national team — American football players were more interested than ever in the best results for the female players. This is because the women's and men's national teams entered into a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), according to which USSF would receive 10% of the prize fund for the 2022 and 2023 World Cups, with the remaining 90% evenly distributed between the men's and women's teams. That is, the better each team performs, the more each team will receive. This agreement, despite FIFA currently paying four times more for men's performances, represents a favourable solution for both teams and is the first of its kind to ensure equal pay for men and women. The CBA will be in effect until 2028. It will be interesting to observe the situation, especially since Gianni Infantino stated that FIFA would strive for equal prize money for the 2026 and 2027 Championships.

During the World Cup, events occurred that prompted governments and sport federations to consider changing the rules of the game. For example, Jamaica's national team achieved an astonishing result by reaching the Round of 16 for the first time in its history. Team manager Lorne Donaldson spoke about the need to support women's football, especially in small countries like Jamaica. Australia's national team also achieved a high result, leading Prime Minister Anthony Albanese to promise \$200 million for the development of women's sports, including ensuring equal access, building more suitable facilities, and supporting grassroots initiatives for women and girls to engage, stay, and participate in sports throughout their lives.

At the 2022 World Cup among men, team captains were prohibited from wearing rainbow and OneLove armbands in support of the LGBTQ+ community. Many expected that the ban would also apply to the women's World Cup. However, FIFA developed a new design for captain's armbands, one of which includes rainbow colours, but is not entirely identical to the familiar pride flag. During the tournament, other statements in support of the LGBTQ+ community were also observed. For example, the captain of the New Zealand national team, Ali Riley, was spotted with nail polish in the colours of the Progress Pride flag during an interview after a game. She said, "I would love for us as captains to come together and working with FIFA to make sure that we are able to have a voice and are able to share what we believe in. But I am confident that we will find ways, no matter what, to make sure our voices are heard." Thembi Kgatlana sported a rainbow haircut during the tournament. In Brisbane, the stadium was lit up with rainbow colours before the England vs. Haiti match. According to Outsports, this year's World Cup has the highest number of players who have openly declared their orientation in the history of the tournament — at least 96, which represents more than 13% of all athletes participating in the tournament.

The Brazilian women's national team arrived in Australia for the World Cup on a plane bearing a statement in support of protesters in Iran. The plane featured images of Mahsa Amini and Amir Nasr-Azadani, along with inscriptions stating, "No woman should be forced to cover her head," and "No man should be hanged for saying this." In September of the previous year, massive protests took place in Iran after the death of Amini, who was detained by the "morality police" for "improper hijab" (strands of hair were visible). Azadani, a former footballer, was arrested during the protests and sentenced to 26 years in prison. Recall that "Unite for Ending Violence Against Women" is one of the alternative slogans proposed by FIFA. The decision of the Brazilian team to make such a statement is an excellent example of solidarity in the struggle for human rights and freedoms.

The final of the World Cup was marred by a scandalous episode. President of the Spanish Football Federation Luis Rubiales faced criticism after kissing forward Jennifer Hermoso on the lips following Spain's victory at the World Cup. The kiss, which occurred on stage during the official celebration after the game, was captured on camera and sparked outrage on social media. Spain's Minister for Equality in the interim government, Irene Montero, described it as a "form of sexual violence that women suffer on a daily basis and up to now invisible, and that we cannot normalize." Initially, Rubiales recorded a video acknowledging that he made a mistake and apologised. On August 24, FIFA's Disciplinary Committee informed Rubiales of the initiation of disciplinary proceedings against him, as the events during the World Cup final could constitute a violation of Articles 1 and 2 of Article 13 of FIFA's Disciplinary Code ("offensive behaviour and violation of the principles of fair play"). Many in the football community expected Rubiales to resign at that time. On August 25, during an extraordinary general meeting of the Spanish Football Federation, Luis Rubiales announced that he would not resign (repeating it five times) and referred to everything happening as a "witch hunt." At that moment, FIFA's Disciplinary

Committee informed Rubiales of the initiation of disciplinary proceedings against him, as the events during the World Cup final could constitute a violation of Articles 1 and 2 of Article 13 of FIFA's Disciplinary Code (“offensive behaviour and violation of the principles of fair play”). Many in the football community expected Rubiales to resign at that time. On August 25, during an extraordinary general meeting of the Spanish Football Federation, Luis Rubiales announced that he would not resign (repeating it five times) and referred to everything happening as a “witch hunt.” At that moment, FIFA's Disciplinary Committee Chairman Jorge Ivan Palacio decided to temporarily suspend Luis Rubiales (for 90 days) from any football activities at the national and international levels pending the completion of the disciplinary proceedings. On September 10, Rubiales resigned from the position of president of RFEF and also from the position of vice-president of UEFA, without waiting for the decision of the Disciplinary Committee.

Sexual harassment in sport

FIFA will investigate a complaint filed against the coach of the Zambian national football team, Bruce Mwape, accusing him of sexual harassment. The alleged incident occurred after one of the training sessions during the World Cup, where several players witnessed the coach touching the chest of one of their teammates. FIFA confirmed receiving an official complaint. However, Reuben Kamanga, the General Secretary of the FAZ, stated that FAZ had not received such a complaint from players or official delegation representatives at the World Cup, making the news a “surprise” to them. Nevertheless, Kamanga assured that the federation takes such accusations seriously and is prepared to respond to any misconduct. In September 2022, charges of sexual violence were already made against Mwape (and another coach, Kaluba Kangwa, who soon left his position). One player shared with The Guardian: “If he [Mwape] wants to sleep with someone, you have to say yes. It’s normal that the coach sleeps with the players in our team.” Mwape denies all these allegations. The investigation is ongoing.

In Spain, the Supreme Court upheld the verdict against a physiotherapist from FC Barcelona for sexual violence against a patient - 4 years of imprisonment, a two-year ban to practice as an osteopath or physiotherapist, and compensation of 10,000 euros. The patient required massage sessions to treat a cervical condition. However, the convicted physiotherapist, Jaume J. Ll., attempted to massage the abdominal area of the patient, descending to the pubic region during one session, and in the next session, touched the chest and clitoris without her consent. Following this, the woman developed an adjustment disorder with reactive anxiety, and she was on sick leave for two months. Jaume J. Ll. tried to justify his actions professionally, claiming that his actions were necessary from a health perspective; he deemed the patient's statements about chest and clitoral touches as false. The court emphasised that the massage technique did not correspond to the pain the patient was experiencing. Physiotherapists must adhere to strict ethical and professional standards in their work to protect the dignity and personal integrity of athletes, mental well-being, and protection against discrimination. In cases of abuse, there should be no outcome other than a fair court decision.

Sexual harassment in sport is a widespread problem that undermines fundamental principles of equality, dignity, and nondiscrimination. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach, including the development of clear anti-harassment policies, educational programmes, enforcement mechanisms, and reporting systems to combat harassment and promote values of equality and dignity in the world of sport.

**Safety, security and service
during sport events**

On August 7, 2023, the qualifying match of the Champions League between FC AEK and FC Dinamo Zagreb was postponed due to the death of a 29-year-old man as a result of stab wounds. The police reported that 100 to 120 Dinamo supporters appeared late on Monday evening near the AEK stadium, where AEK fans had gathered. Clashes erupted over an hour after the guest team's training ended and the team left the stadium. Fans from both sides threw flares, homemade explosives, and stones. Three Greek and five Croatian fans were also injured and are undergoing treatment, while 98 individuals were arrested. Greek football suffers from violence on and off the field, and authorities have repeatedly promised to restore order in the game. Fan clashes often occur before or after matches, despite significant fines.

After the football match between FC Śląsk and FC Zagłębia in Wrocław, an unpleasant incident occurred: one of the fans took the Śląsk club scarf from a Belarusian for “speaking Russian with his friend.” The man, who has been supporting the club for 2 years, shared this on his social media account X. This post gathered 321,000 views; comments included words of support and sympathy, as well as insults and approval of the fan's actions. The club's management also took notice of the incident — communications director Patryk Załączny apologised on behalf of the club and invited the Belarusian to come for a new “specially prepared scarf.” This is not the first case of discrimination among Śląsk fans. Anti-Ukrainian banners were also noticed at the same match: “Stop the Ukrainization of Poland,” “Ukrainians killed children in Volhynia,” “80 years of shameful silence about Volhynia,” and others.

In Kazan, after the Russian Super Cup football match between FC CSKA and FC Zenit, 196 fans were detained; protocols on propaganda and public demonstration of Nazi symbols were drawn up against 30 of them. A distinctive feature of this match was that fans did not need a Fan ID to attend. The active part of the fans boycotts obtaining this document. The situation with the detention of fans in Kazan shows that introducing additional control over fans cannot be the sole means of creating an inclusive and safe atmosphere at football matches.

The football match between the national teams of Romania and Kosovo was interrupted due to the actions of fans displaying banners “Kosovo is Serbia” and “Bessarabia is Romania.” UEFA imposed sanctions of 40,000 euros on FRF and ordered the next home match of Romania, the Euro qualifying match against Andorra on October 15 in Bucharest, to be held without fans. UEFA sanctions underscore the importance of monitoring sports events and the inevitability of punishment for violations of their conduct.

The issue of discrimination and violence by fans requires collective efforts — from fans, clubs, authorities, and society as a whole, aimed at upholding the principles of equality and dignity so that everyone can enjoy football without fearing discrimination or violence.

War and sport

In the previous period, we shared the news that the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, supported the initiative of footballers Shevchenko and Zinchenko to organise a charity match to raise funds for the restoration of a lyceum in Ukraine. Dozens of football stars participated in the Game4Ukraine match at Stamford Bridge, playing in teams of “blues” and “yellows.” As a result, around 1 million euros were raised during the match (the collection continues). The match was broadcast in nearly 200 countries worldwide. The game was also used as a social tool to remind people about what is happening in Ukraine and how they can help (through social videos, actions, sports events, and performances by artists).

During the FC Aris - FC Dinamo Kyiv match, fans of the Greek club displayed a banner that read “Smash Azov Nazis.” The UAF sent a letter to UEFA and the HFF requesting a reaction to the incident. The UAF assumes that “local ultras associated with Russian fan movements manufactured the banner, as the message on the banner fully coincides with the messages of Russian propaganda.” Although the banner was removed after about 10 minutes, the fact of this incident raises concerns about the promotion of violence in the football community and the perception of events in Ukraine.

Yelena Isinbaeva, a two-time Olympic pole vault champion from Russia, is expected to resume her activities in the IOC from September 2023. In connection with this, Ukraine requested an investigation into the fact that Isinbaeva holds the rank of major. In response, the athlete stated on her VKontakte page that her rank of major is “nominal” in nature, she is not serving in the armed forces of Russia and never has, and she has never been a deputy in the State Duma. Isinbaeva has been on Ukraine's sanctions list since February 26, 2023. There has been no official response from the IOC, but on September 5, a list of IOC Commissions was published, including Yelena Isinbaeva.

In Russia, the Second Football League has kicked off – it's the third-tier division in men's football. The Second League consists of two divisions: A and B. In the 2023/2024 season, two clubs from Crimea, “Sevastopol” and “Rubin” from Yalta, started in Division B. Currently, there is a UEFA position stating the prohibition of participation of clubs from Crimea in competitions under the auspices of the Russian Football Union (RFU). Despite the representatives of the RFU claiming that they have reorganised the tournaments since 2023 (2023/2024 season) and that the Second League is no longer conducted under the auspices of the union and has an amateur character, the regulations of League A specify that the RFU organises and controls the conduct of the competition. In turn, the FIFA statutes provide for the possibility of a team from one country participating in the competitions of another country with the consent of both parties: the previous federation of which the team was a member, and FIFA. In this regard, we believe that FIFA has all the grounds to apply sanctions against the RFU.

Other human rights violations in sport

In Brazil, the “Vini Jr. Law” aimed at combating racism during sporting events has been approved. In May 2023, one of the most prominent scandals in football involved the case of “Vinicius Junior,” a Brazilian forward for FC Real Madrid, who faced racist abuse during a football match. This prompted discussions on racism in football at both the international sport organisation and government levels. The law, named after the footballer, provides for the interruption or cancellation of sporting events in cases of racist acts. It also introduces the possibility of filing complaints with the prosecutor's office and other authorities. In South America, this law is the first of its kind.

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) shared the results of the first meeting of the Athlete Advisory Group on Human Rights in Anti-Doping. The creation of the Initial Human Rights Impact Assessment (IHRIA) system was proposed to ensure WADA's compliance with and protection of the universally recognized human rights of athletes. The Advisory Group discussed various topics, from the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to prioritisation and discussion of ways to address potential human rights violations. The next meeting, in September 2023, will focus on specific activities with particularly high risks of negatively impacting human rights.

After participating in a race in Sunderland, 57 triathletes complained of illness and diarrhoea. Samples taken three days before the competition showed the presence of E. coli colonies almost 40 times higher than the previous month's levels. British Triathlon stated that their testing results met standards, and Northumbrian Water claimed no responsibility for the incident. Potential costs in case of cancelling the competition could have been a significant challenge for the organisers. However, they do not justify the evident threat to the athletes' health posed by an unsafe event environment.

Pep Guardiola, the head coach of Manchester United FC, stated that reducing the number of matches in football could have a positive impact on players' health, both physically and mentally. Concerns about the increasing number of matches in a season and resulting player overload have been raised by other colleagues of Guardiola. More matches and insufficient time for recovery increase the risk of injuries and burnout. Guardiola suggested that footballers should act independently to bring about change, citing the example of the Spanish women's national team, which successfully advocated for improvements in working conditions.

During the FC Metz - FC OM match, with a score of 0:1 after 45 minutes, Metz midfielder Kevin N'Doram expressed dissatisfaction, stating in an interview with Prime Video during halftime: “We lack character. Excuse me for the term, but we play like f**s [offensive term for gay people].” This homophobic comment sparked numerous negative reactions on social media. N'Doram apologised immediately after the match, stating that he did not intend to offend anyone. However, apologies did not exempt the player from sanctions, and the LFP Disciplinary Committee is currently investigating the incident. This incident can be regarded as a “gross/offensive

violation” (disqualification of 3 to 4 matches) or as a “discriminatory violation” (disqualification of up to 10 matches). The atmosphere in football has often been toxically masculine, and addressing such discriminatory remarks is a positive step toward a more inclusive sports environment.

Continuing on the theme of toxicity in the football environment and the issue of homophobic remarks, here are some excerpts from an interview with English footballer, Arsenal FC and England national team goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale. He shared his challenging success story, touching on highs and lows, discussing his relationships with fans, and revealing poignant moments from his personal life to showcase the behind-the-scenes of success. “I can already hear the comments. ‘Shut up, Ramsdale. Stick to football, lad.’ But this is about football. Football is for everyone.” “I want this game I love to be a safe and welcoming place for everyone. I want my brother—or anyone of any sexuality, race, or religion—to come to games without having to fear abuse.”

Conclusion

De facto authorities in Belarus continue to exert pressure on representatives of the sport industry, thereby depriving Belarusian sport of the opportunity for development. Punishing athletes and coaches for expressing their opinions, taking a stance, and disagreeing with the regime in the country is an example of ongoing widespread human rights violations. The reluctance of sport officials to compromise and accept proposed options for athletes' participation in international competitions on neutral terms could paralyse Belarusian sport.

The court decision in the case of Caster Semenya became the first precedent indicating the actual protection by the ECHR in relation to intersex individuals, and the acceptance of the World Aquatics document on gender equality is the first example in history of promoting such inclusion at the level of international sport federations.

The Women's World Cup undoubtedly became the most significant event in the world of women's sport. The tournament was intense, and from a human rights perspective, there were disputes over pay, actions in support of the LGBTQ+ community, and a scandal related to sexual harassment. All of this indicates that the world of women's sport is a major and active platform for promoting human rights values and their protection.

Clashes among football fans and other forms of conflicts between them, which can even lead to death, once again remind us of the need for action at all levels to ensure a safe and inclusive environment so that everyone can enjoy football without any discrimination and fear of encountering violence.

Russia's war against Ukraine affects the sport industry in various forms, involving different mechanisms of implementation and protection of human rights. On one hand, charitable sport events and actions are conducted to support Ukraine. On the other hand, debates persist about allowing Russian athletes to compete in international forums.

News on racism, the right to health, and the rights of the LGBTQ+ community demonstrate the profound impact of sport on society and the potential of the sport industry in the field of human rights. By promoting diversity, inclusivity, and justice, sports can become a catalyst for positive social change.

FairPlay is a human rights in/through/for sports organization.

Our mission: empowering people in exercising sports and human rights for equal, inclusive, and fair Belarus and the World.

Our goal: human rights are respected in the sports industry.

To achieve our mission, we:

- **Analyze** policies, laws and practices and share about them in clear and accessible language;
- Engage in human rights **advocacy** at the national and international levels;
- **Educate** and raise awareness, including through sporting events.

This text was prepared jointly by a team of authors.

E-mail: sport@humanconstantia.org

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