
The Olympic Journey of Tug of War: Inclusion, Exclusion, and Recognition (1900-Present)

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Résumé

The road to Olympic Recognition remains a challenge to many disciplines. While some sports successfully navigate this road, others, specifically traditional and regional sports, face significant barriers. Tug of War, a sport that appeared in the Olympic Games Programme from 1900 to 1920, offers a revealing case of how a sport can become Olympic, lose its place, and later seek renewed recognition, highlighting the challenges and the vulnerability a sport can face by seeking recognition from the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

This study examines the historical trajectory of Tug of War within the Olympic framework, exploring how it was introduced to the Olympic Programme, the factors behind its exclusion after 1920, and the efforts employed to seek recognition and future inclusion. By analyzing the archives of the Olympic Studies Centre of the IOC, such as the Minutes of Meeting (Procès-Verbaux) of the Sessions, the Olympic Programme Commission, the official reports of the Olympic Games and the correspondence between the IOC and the Tug of War International Federation, this study allows a reconstruction of how "Olympic legitimacy" has been defined and redefined over time.

Findings suggest that Tug of War's removal after 1920 should be situated within broader programme rationalization aimed at reducing the number of sports/events. Its continued absence today is shaped by a different set of constraints: limited global reach and weaker alignment with contemporary IOC priorities emphasizing universality, media visibility, and youth appeal.

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Mots-Clés: Tug of War, Olympic Recognition, Olympic Sports, Olympic Programme

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