

## **Образ российского спортсмена в англоязычном интернет дискурсе**

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**Аннотация.** Целью данного исследования является определение характера публикаций зарубежных СМИ к российским спортсменам и российскому спорту. В статье рассмотрены публикации иностранных СМИ, касающихся представителей российского спорта. Проблемой данного исследования является создание зарубежными СМИ отрицательного имиджа российских спортсменов и России. Актуальность исследования заключается в том, что скандалы с использованием запрещенных препаратов стали одним из основных инструментов в мировом профессиональном спорте для решения политических вопросов.

**Ключевые слова:** образ спортсмена, межкультурный, мягкая сила, спорт, положительный, отрицательный, коннотация, Олимпийские игры.

## **The image of a Russian athlete in English-language Internet Discourse**

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this study is a theoretical review of sport as a soft power and consideration of foreign mass media publications concerning Russian athletes and

sports. The author highlights presentation features of the image of the Russian athlete in foreign media.

**Keywords:** multicultural, cross-cultural, soft power, athlete's image, sport, positive, negative, connotation, the Olympic games.

At all times sport and politics go hand in hand, despite the claim of many that sport is beyond politics, reflecting each other in how they portray the human character, institutional relations and ideology behind these relationships. It is a powerful tool for building a positive image of the country. Two institutions, sport and politics, are inseparable, and a link between them is inevitable. Subsequently, sport has eventually directly related to politics.

In the 1980s , sport as an instrument of forming a positive image of the country acquired a scientifically grounded basis in the concept of «soft power» by the American political scientist, professor of Harvard University J. Naya. According to J. Naya, “Power is the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes one wants. When we measure power in terms of the changed behavior of others, we have first to know their preferences” (J. Nye, Soft power: the means to success in world politics, Public Affairs, 2004, p.2). It should be mentioned that there are two kinds of power act: hard and soft. Hard power is a form of political power involving the use of military and/or economic coercion to correct the conduct or interests of other political forces and its strategies focus on coercive diplomacy. It was a major resource in twentieth-century politics. So it is reasonable to assume that there is more skilful, indirect and invisible way to reach desired and expected results. And this tactic is known as soft power. In the opinion of Nye soft power means “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies.”(p.10).

High-profile sports events have an impact on other areas of society and increasingly become the subject of active discussion in the media. A case in point is the doping discovered in Russian athletes.

According to A.V. Gulidov the image of the Russian athletes has negative connotations. In 2016, Richard Henry McLaren, a law professor at Western University

published the article "Russia operated state-sanctioned doping system at Sochi Olympics, report concludes". He claims that Russian athletes' results were falsified within 2 years in order to conceal their positive doping tests. The consequences were crucial: a great number of the athletes were excluded from the Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. Furthermore, it contributed to developing a negative reputation and discrediting the Russian athletes' and Russia's reputation as a whole in foreign media. Subsequently, all the successes and achievements of the athletes stemmed from banned substances. One of the most representative examples of such confrontations between the USA and Russia is the victory of the Russian football team Rostov in the UEFA Championship League. All members were tested. While generally only one of the team is chosen to undergo the procedure (doping control). That was of unprecedented importance in foreign media. The media knowingly appeared false information about success of the Rostov club. Mass media tied their victory with the use of prohibited drugs, although not a single doping test was positive. The German tabloid Bild reported that the initial doping of the trial showed positive results, but thanks to Vitaly Mutko (a Russian Minister of Sports) the results were substituted. They also gave Russians the status of "major losers" of the Olympic Games and mentioned Russia as the host of the World Cup in 2018, which knowingly creates a negative image of the competition. The same tactic is followed by the UK edition, the Daily Mail. The newspaper weekly publishes articles on scandals and investigations concerning the World Cup and doping issues.

A. A. Gladkova shares the same opinion of the previous researcher. One of the key factors of the country's prestige and authority in the world are the Olympic Games, as it is an integral part of the life of society. Foreign media, along with the national ones, play a significant role in shaping the country's image. Conveying a positive or negative image can change the attitude of the world community towards not only athletes playing for the national team but also to the country as a whole. Even before the opening of the Vancouver Winter Games, De Volkskrant published an article written in a sharply critical style «Russians complain about "psychological pressure" from the International Olympic Committee». Therefore, the Dutch media inherently

form a negative attitude towards the Russian national team as being "unable to recognize their

mistakes made by the self-assured team of athletes". The authors of the article also mentioned a doping scandal involving Russian athletes. The American newspaper USA Today stated that "the once-formidable Red Machine had lost its former greatness and turned into a team of athletes unable to take the lead in sports and fell to an unusually low level". The New York Times, following an American publication, accuses Russia of complaining about everything, blaming its failures on the circumstances around it. In general, Russia is not perceived as a serious rival. Foreign media are sure that the former greatness of Russian sportsmen has long gone. It is obvious that foreign media hold negative views about Russian sports, constantly mentioning doping scandals, unscrupulous athletes and others. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning a small number of positive publications in the British press. However, there is also a contrast between the achievements of athletes from the USSR and Russia. The authors point out that the latter are insufficiently prepared to speak at the international level.

It is interesting that the Russian figure skater and hockey player Evgeny Plushchenko and Alexander Ovechkin respectively are indisputable favorites of foreign media. One of the possible reasons for that sympathy can be considered the characteristics of the personal traits and behavior of Russian athletes. According to the view of foreigners, the key to a successful performance is – strength, determination, professionalism and courage, bordering on insolence. All these options make Russian professionals closer to their foreign competitors. As for Alexander Ovechkin as the «big star of sports», «the main force of the NHL», «the star of the new generation», «the best hockey player in the world», his confident playing style can be explained by his long and successful career abroad as a NHL player.

USA Today was quite abrupt about Kawaguchi's and Smirnova's performance. The author claims that Russian figure skating has obvious difficulties. A new scandal has erupted around the performance of Domnina and Shabalin, the newspaper USA Today criticized their «Dance of Aborigines», accusing it of being an «offensive» and «non-authentic» number. All 20 publications were heavily negative. The Age and The

Sydney Morning Herald cited statements by Australian Aborigines claiming that “the dance was an affront to their national culture and hurt the feelings of the local population”. Thus, the American press branded our athletes as tactless and ignorant athletes, ready to do anything to win. Interestingly, the New Zealand, Dutch, and British media have not been so harshly judging in their publications.

To sum up, it can be concluded that Russia most often attracts foreign media in connection with various doping scandals. Russian sportsmen have become known as intolerant to other cultures (Domnina’s and Shabalin’s performance). In general, the Russian sport was shown to be backward in comparison with the Soviet. The bright examples of that are the losses of Russia in figure skating at the Olympic Games, as well as the «crushing defeat» of the Russian hockey team. However, there can be found several publications with a positive trend: foreign editors mention the undoubted merits of Plushenko and Ovechkin.

The New York Times and USA Today are the biggest opponents of Russia and Russian sports. Such a conclusion is self-evident given their negative attitude towards the performances of the Russian national team, all the more obvious taking into account fairly neutral reports in the press of other countries (the New Zealand, Dutch, and British media).

In conclusion, it can be noted that criticism of foreign athletes performances and praise reviews are directly related to the formation of a certain image of the country of these athletes.

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