



# The top nations in the medal table of the current olympic games

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## Abstract

**Objective of the study** was to determine the ranking of teams in the medal table and the contribution of athlete training systems in Olympic sports among the nations that have achieved the most success in the modern Olympic Games.

**Methods and structure of the study.** The final results of the competitions and the information from specialized literature on the history and statistics of the modern Olympic Games are being examined and summarized.

**Results and conclusions.** It has been confirmed that one of the key factors for the success of nations in the modern Olympic Games, as seen by fans, athletes, politicians, and the media, is the nation's position in the Olympic medal table.

At present, a group of 16 nations has emerged as the top contenders in the Olympic medal table, having secured at least 100 gold medals at the Olympic Games. The United States, the Soviet Union, and China currently lead the Olympic medal table. Among the nations with the most developed state-sponsored athlete training systems, China (ranked third) and Russia (ranked 13th) stand out.

The achievements of the other top nations in the Olympic medal table also demonstrate the significant influence of the state in fostering athletes in Olympic sports.

**Keywords:** *modern Olympic Games, unofficial team standings, ranking of the team medal standings, the system of training athletes in Olympic sports.*

**Introduction.** Clause 6.1 of the Olympic Charter [1] states: «The Olympic Games (OG) are competitions in individual or team sports among athletes, not among nations. They bring together athletes selected by the respective NOCs whose applications have been accepted by the IOC». This clause contains two opposing statements. The first is that «the OG are competitions ... among athletes, not among nations». The second sentence of clause 6.1 contradicts the previous one, since «athletes are selected by the respective NOC», that is, an organization representing a specific country. Thus, at the opening and closing ceremonies of the OG, delegations march through the stadium under the flag of their country, and at the awards ceremony, the flags of the countries that won prizes in the competitions are raised. Therefore, from the very first OG, official leaders and representatives of national teams, politicians, and various media outlets tried to identify the countries that performed most successfully in the past OG, for which, despite

resistance, the IOC used the rating or position of these countries in the unofficial team classification. Most often, when determining the rating in the UTR, the system of awarding points for Olympic medals was used: 3-2-1 or 5-3-1. Less often, other options were used: for the first six, eight and ten places [2, 5]. Since about the second half of the 20th century, a more objective indicator has been used - the number of medals won by athletes of one country based on the results of performances at the Olympic Games. With this option, the advantage in the UTR goes to the country that has won a greater number of Olympic gold medals. In the event of a tie in gold awards, the number of silver medals is taken into account, and in the event of a tie in silver, the number of bronze medals. The same system is used to determine the position of countries in the overall team medal count (OTC) for all past modern Olympic Games. But it should be taken into account that, according to the IOC decision, the awards of countries that no longer exist are not added up to



the medals won by newly formed states. For example, Germany does not count medals from the United Team of Germany (1956-1964), the GDR and the FRG (1968-1988), and Russia does not count medals from the ROC team (2020).

**Objective of the study** was to determine the ranking of teams in the medal table and the contribution of athlete training systems in Olympic sports among the nations that have achieved the most success in the modern Olympic Games.

**Methods and structure of the study.** Study, analysis and generalization of the final results of competitions and data from specialized literature on the history and statistics of modern Olympic Games.

**Results of the study and discussion.** The first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens (Greece) in 1896. Representatives of 14 countries competed for 43 sets of medals in nine sports. Three times (1916, 1940 and 1944) the Olympic Games were not held due to world wars. The program of Olympic competitions expanded, and the number of participating countries gradually increased, and at the last XXXIII Olympic Games in Paris in 2024 (Olympic Games-24), 329 sets of medals were competed for in 39 sports, and athletes from 206 teams took part in the competitions. Over the past 30 modern Olympic Games, athletes from 115 countries and teams have become champi-

ons, and 158 have become medalists. If we compare the OMC indicators after the 2020 Tokyo Olympics [3] and after the 24th Olympic Games, the number of countries that have won 100 or more Olympic gold medals in the entire history of modern Olympic Games has increased from 14 to 16. South Korea and the Netherlands have become new members of the TOP-16. Romania is in 17th place with 93 gold medals. The position of these countries in the OMC and their indicators for the number of awards, number of victories in the OMC and participation in the Olympic Games are presented in the table.

The leading 16 countries in the modern Olympic Games (TOP-16) account for 2/3 of all Olympic medals awarded since 1896: 11626 out of 17829 (65,2%), including gold – 3884 out of 5790 (67,1%). According to the results of the last 24 Olympic Games, 12 countries from the TOP-16 (excluding the USSR, GDR, Russia and Finland, which has 0 medals) managed to win 210 gold (63,9%), and in total – 613 (58,7%) medals. It turns out that these 12 countries have won more Olympic medals than the other 194 teams. In our opinion, such achievements of the TOP-16 countries in Olympic sports are largely determined by the following factors: 1) high levels of industrial, scientific, technical and socio-economic development; 2) the number of participations in the Olympic Games; 3) the specifics

*Ranking of leading countries in the OMC of modern Olympic Games (1 – victories in UTR; 2 – participation in Olympic Games)*

Place	Country	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total	1	2
1	USA	1096	871	774	2741	19	29
2	USSR	395	319	296	1010	6	9
3	PRC	303	226	198	727	1	12
4	Great Britain	298	340	343	981	1	30
5	France	240	281	297	818	1	30
6	Italy	229	201	228	658	--	29
7	Germany	218	220	255	693	1	18
8	Japan	189	162	191	542	--	24
9	Hungary	187	161	182	530	--	28
10	Australia	182	192	226	600	--	28
11	GDR	153	129	127	409	--	5
12	Sweden	152	180	182	514	---	29
13	Russia	147	125	150	422	--	6
14	Netherlands	110	112	134	356	---	28
15	South Korea	109	100	111	320	--	19
16	Finland	101	84	120	305	---	27
17	Romania	93	102	124	319	---	21



of the athlete training system, as well as the national and sports traditions characteristic of each of these countries [4]. The undisputed leader of the OMC is the United States, which has the best results both in individual medal categories (gold, silver and bronze) and in the total number of awards. The country has always been in the top three of the UTR: 19 times – first, 8 times – second and twice – third. The success of the United States is based on a strategy focused on training athletes in most types of the Olympic program with minimal government involvement and with an emphasis on medal-rich and commercially attractive ones, including track and field ( $357 + 282 + 222 = 861$ ) and swimming ( $266 + 193 + 151 = 610$ ). These sports account for more than half of the gold (57%) and all Olympic awards (54%) of this country.

The main competitors of the USA at the Olympic Games in the second half of the last century were the USSR and the GDR, in which all spheres of human activity, including the training of athletes, were fully provided and controlled by the state. From 1952 to 1992, the rivalry in the sports arenas between athletes of socialist and capitalist countries, and especially between the USA and the USSR, was always in the center of attention of athletes, fans, politicians and the media. Almost 35 years have passed since the USSR and the GDR ceased to exist, but to this day the USSR ranks 2nd and the GDR 11th in the OMC.

Soviet athletes performed most successfully in artistic gymnastics ( $72+67+47=182$ ) and in track and field ( $64+55+74=193$ ), in which they won a third of the gold (34%) and all Olympic awards (37%). The overall performance of the USSR at nine Olympic Games: second place in the OMC, six victories and three second places in the UTR. In direct competition, the USSR defeated the USA at five Olympic Games, and the USA outpaced the USSR at three sports forums.

The most significant change in the OMC ranking after the 24th Olympic Games in Paris can be considered the third place of the PRC, which continues to improve the state system of training athletes in relation to the peculiarities of the country's development. The best results of Chinese athletes were achieved in diving ( $55+26+11=92$ ), weightlifting ( $46+16+8=70$ ), table tennis ( $37+21+8=66$ ) and artistic gymnastics ( $31+26+21=78$ ). In total, these four sports brought the country 55.8% of gold and 42.1% of all Olympic medals. As for other changes in the ranking of leading countries in the OMC after the 24 Olympic Games, there are very few of them. Thus, Great Britain dropped

from third to fourth place. France, Italy and Germany retained their positions. But Japan moved to 8th place, becoming third in the UTR for the second time in a row (2020 and 2024). Sweden also managed to get ahead of Russia and reached 12th place, coming close to the GDR. The Russian Federation has been independently competing in the Olympic Games since 1996 and, despite the enormous economic and social upheavals of the end of the last century, was able to preserve and adapt to new conditions the state system of training athletes inherited from the USSR. But the country, unlike China, is losing its positions in the OMC, which is influenced by the following reasons: the depletion of the reserves of the Soviet system of training athletes and doping disqualifications of Russians. Since 2015, Russia has been under constant sanctions from the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and the IOC: Russian track and field athletes, rowers and weightlifters were not allowed to compete in the 2016 Olympic Games, and the Russians competed as the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) team at the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. Since March 2022, Russian athletes have been banned from all international competitions by decision of the IOC and international sports federations (ISFs). The reason for the isolation is the special military operation of the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine. As a result, only 15 Russians took part in the 24 Olympic Games as «individual neutral athletes» (AIN), who managed to win one silver medal. Thus, after the last two Olympic Games, Russia was unable to improve its performance in OMC, and based on the results of doping tests and their re-tests, it lost 36 ( $9+16+11$ ) medals from the Olympic Games from 2004-2016.

Conclusions. 1. Since the middle of the last century, the Olympic Games, which unite competitions in summer sports, have become an event of planetary scale and the pinnacle of Olympic sports development. One of the criteria for the success of countries' participation in modern Olympic Games for fans, athletes, politicians and the media is the country's rating in the Olympic medal count. Currently, among the leading countries of the Olympic Games, a group of TOP-16 has been formed, which have managed to win at least 100 gold medals at the Olympic Games. 2. The USA, USSR and PRC lead the Olympic Games. The absolute leader is the USA. The country is the only one of the TOP-16, in which, with minimal state support, the system of training athletes in Olympic sports has stood the test of time and proven its effectiveness. But



even greater effectiveness has been demonstrated by the state system of training athletes, which developed in the second half of the 20th century in the countries of the socialist camp. This can be evidenced by the phenomenal achievements of the USSR (2nd place in the OMC) and the GDR (11th place) in Olympic sports in the 1970-90s.

3. At present, the countries with a predominantly developed state system for training athletes from the TOP-16 include China (3rd place) and Russia (13th place). But if the results of the Russian Federation are gradually declining, and the chances of participating in the Olympic Games under the state flag in the near future are minimal (due to the geopolitical situation and doping scandals), then the achievements of the PRC in this century can indicate a struggle between this country and the United States for leadership in Olympic sports.

4. The achievements of the other leading countries in the OMC also indicate a significant role of the state in training athletes in Olympic sports. And if in the last century this was evidenced by the achievements of the socialist countries (mainly the USSR and the GDR), then at present all the states from the TOP-

16, regardless of their political system, human and economic potential, are striving to increase the role of state structures in matters of developing Olympic sports.

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