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# Women's basketball at the Olympic Games

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**Abstract.** The article refers to the evolution of Women Basketball Olympic Tournaments, trying to present and analyze these tournaments by associating the information related with the study of basketball to mapping representation. In the first part, the authors refer to a number of papers able to approach the research of sports as a result of the common study of specialists in physical education and sports, and also geography. There are also presented the main events that determined the inclusion of women basketball in the Olympic Games program. The gradual evolution of Women Basketball Olympic Tournaments, the participation of national teams, the medals obtained are presented and analyzed by associating the map with different ways of graphical representation.

**Keywords:** Basketball, women, Olympic Games

## Introduction

The Olympic Games represent one of the major events of our days; they have the highest audience as they are watched by millions of spectators and billions of viewers. Given their role in the modern society and their major impact, the various aspects related to the Olympic Games are subjects of interests for specialists in multiple fields. Besides the researches that are specific to a certain scientific field, a new series of researches that approach the phenomena from a multidisciplinary perspective appeared. This kind of approach also includes collaborations between

specialists from the geography and sports fields. Thus, in Romania, the first paper of this type was published in 1938 (Mihăilă & Ulmeanu, 1938). Within the Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Geography, under the guidance of the professor doctor Surd Vasile, various doctorate thesis that approach sports from a geographical point of view were developed. (Sandor, 2005) and (Bogdan, 2009). Moreover, various journals from Romania published papers written by both specialists in geography and sports (Maroti & Ilieș, 1995; Stașac et al., 2005; Sandor, 2003).

The spatial analysis studies of sports have in many cases a multidisciplinary character by completing and consolidating the scientific endeavor with issues and methods specific to other domains (Iieș et al, 2014).

Despite the above mentioned achievements, the consultation of the biography reveals that the existent resources were not fully used and developed. Given this conclusion, we consider that a paper that approaches the women's tournaments at the Olympic Games, studied from the sports and geography perspective, is a topical subject that can contribute to a thorough investigation of the studied phenomena. "The principles which guide, the methods and tools which facilitate the geographic analysis or the spatial analysis of a phenomenon or process and which represented the basis of geographic scientific foundation, they can all be extremely useful in the spatial analysis of sports activities under all their structural and manifestation forms"(Iieș et al, 2014, 9).

The geographical concepts of space and place are central not only to a definition of sport but also to an enhanced understanding of sport's significance (Bale, 2003). The spatial perspective adds much to our knowledge of the history of sport.

### **The era preceding the inclusion of the women's basketball in the Olympic Games programme**

Sport, as social phenomenon, must always be understood and explained in its historical, political, economic, social and cultural context (Buhaș, 2015).

The inclusion of the women's basketball in the Olympic Games programme was initiated in the 20's by Alice Millat, president of the International Women's Sports Federation, and re-discussed at the International Olympic Committee session held in Oslo on February 28, 1935. The position adopted by the majority of the participants was that the proposal would not be favored (\*\*\*,1998b).

Other proposals for including the women's basketball in the Olympic programme were also presented in the International Olympic Committee sessions held in Paris 1955, Baden-Baden 1963, Tokyo 1964, Madrid 1965, but the necessary votes for approval were not obtained (\*\*\*, 1998a).

In 1967, Teheran, within the 66<sup>th</sup> session, fifty-seven out of the present members of the International Olympic Committee voted in the favor of declaring the women's basketball as an Olympic discipline. Therefore, according to the Rule 29, basketball, together with athletics, rowing, gymnastics, swimming, equestrian sports, shooting, archery, yachting and volleyball, would be one of the women's sports accepted at the Olympic Games. In September, 1972, in Munich,

during the 73<sup>rd</sup> session of International Olympic Committee has been approved to organize, starting with Montreal, 1976, Olympic tournaments for the women's basketball (\*\*\*, 1998e).

### **The participation of the women's team in the basketball Olympic tournaments**

The fact that the women's basketball was included in the Olympic Games programme had a significant influence on its direction and development. During the years that followed its inclusion in the Olympic programme the number of female participants in this sport increased and the support received from the national and international forums was consolidated. After it become an Olympic discipline, the official national and international competitions or other activities related to this sports discipline were given a lot of media coverage both by the newspapers and the TV channels. All of this led to and increased impact of the women's basketball and to an increased number of spectators and televiewers interested in this sport.

Starting with the 67<sup>th</sup> session of the International Olympic Committee, Mexico City, 1968, the evolution of the women's basketball was influenced, besides by the efforts of the International Amateur Basketball Federation or of the national Olympic committees and national federations, by the decisions taken by the Olympic Games Study Commission (\*\*\*, 1998c).

The Olympic basketball tournaments for the national women representatives were organized with the participation of six teams in the 1976, 1980 and 1984 Olympics, of eight teams in the Seoul and Barcelona Olympic Games and of twelve teams in the 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012 Olympics. Therefore, the women's basketball reached, from the point of view of the number of teams and players, the level of the men's basketball. The objective of the International Olympic Committee and of the International Amateur Basketball Federation was accomplished due to the support and the reactions of the international sports forums that took into consideration the tendencies surfaced in the modern society and in the Olympic sports during the past years, when the emancipation and encouragement of women became compulsory in a contemporary era (\*\*\*, 1998d). The widening of the participation area in the Olympic women's basketball tournaments greatly contributed to the attainment of the universality Olympic movement.

During the ten Olympics that included the women's basketball in their programme, thirty-one teams participated. The teams that were the most present were the teams from the Unites States of America and Russia (Russia, the Soviet Union and the Commonwealth of Independent States) that had nine participations, those of Australia and China that had seven participations, followed by South Korea with six participations.

If we analyze the presence of these teams from the point of view of their geographical origins, we conclude that 41.48% are from Europe, followed by 19.14% from North America and 17.02% from Asia, 10.63% from Australia and Oceania, 6.38% from South America, 5.31% from Africa. The decisions of the International

Olympic Committee were taken based on the propositions made by the Olympic Programme Commission and the International Basketball Federation, in order to assist the access of the teams from every geographical area by including them in the qualification tournament system of continental championships, by increasing the number of teams accepted in the women's Olympic basketball tournament to eight and then to twelve. Thus, a higher number of participants were registered when it came to the national representatives from Africa, Asia, South America and Australia/Oceania. If in Moscow, 1980, the percentage of the European teams was of 83.33%, after the different measures taken in order to broaden the participation areas, between 1996 and 2012 the percentage varied from 25% in 1996 to 50% at the Olympic Games from London, 2012.

During the ten Olympic women's basketball tournaments, ten national teams obtained medals. The highest number of medals, nine, was won by the United States of America, followed by Russia with six medals. Only the teams from these two countries succeeded to win first place. The distribution of medals according to continents shows that the women's basketball tournaments were dominated by the representatives of Europe (11 medals) and North America (9 medals).

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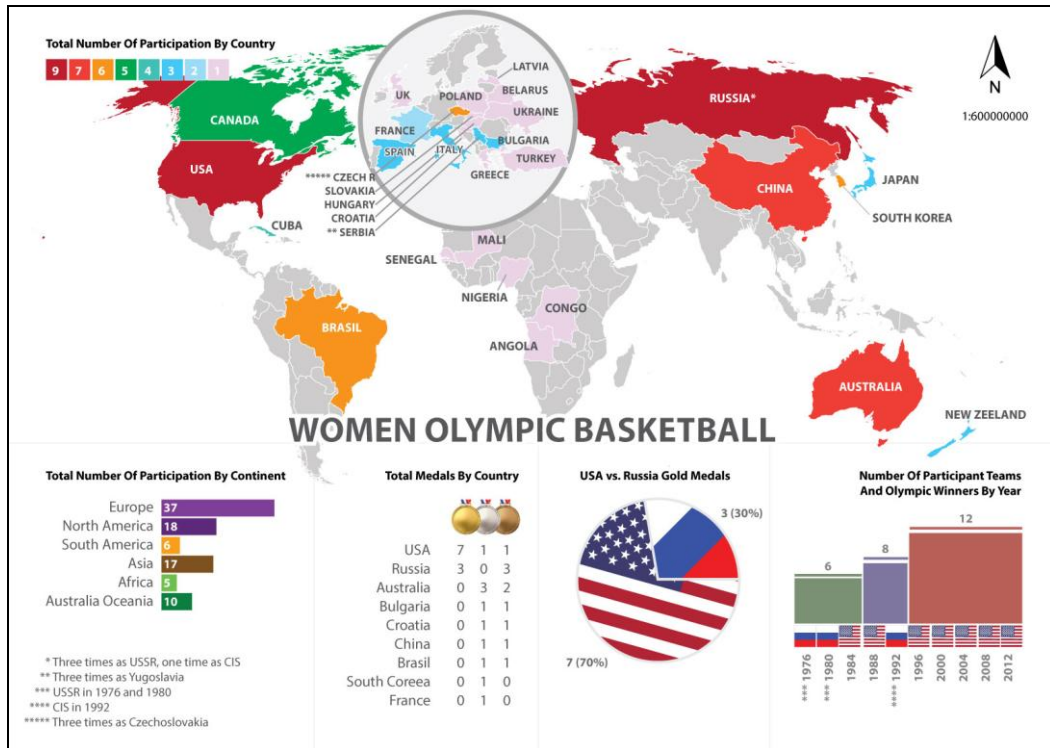


Figure 1. Women's basketball at the Olympic Games

**Conclusions**

Even though basketball is the first team sports game practiced by women and even though its inclusion in the Olympic Games programme was initiated in 1920, the favorable decision of the International Olympic Committee was adopted only during the 73<sup>rd</sup> session from Munich, 1972.

During the ten Olympic Games that included the women's basketball, thirty-one national teams participated. Their distribution on continents highlights the predominant role played by Europe (41.48 %). The other continents present percentages between 19.14% by North America and 5.31% by Africa.

From the participant countries only 10 succeeded to win medals. Most of the medals (66.66%) were won by the teams from Europe (36.66%) and from North America (30%).

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