



Sports television on Russian state TV channels in the winter seasons 2021-2024

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Abstract

Objective of the study is to identify the composition and dynamics of indicators of sports programs on publicly available Russian state television channels in the winter competition seasons of 2021-2024.

Methods and structure of the study. An analysis, comparison and generalization of the indicators of sports programs on Russian state television was conducted.

Results and conclusions. The IOC's decision to suspend Russian athletes from participating in international competitions from March 2022 led to the forced change of international tournaments with Russian on the broadcast network of state TV channels. Two years of isolation of Russian athletes from major international competitions did not change the structure of sports programs in the winter seasons of 2021-2024, but played a major role in the sharp decline in interest in these programs on Russian television. So, after the successful Olympic season 21/22, the ratings of sports programs in the next two winter seasons decreased at least 2-3,5 times.

Keywords: *Russian state TV channels, structure and indicators of sports programs, winter competition seasons 2021-2024.*

Introduction. The leading positions of Russian athletes in international tournaments of the highest rank (European Championships (EC) and World Championships (WC), World Cups (WC), Olympic Games and Olympic Winter Games (OWG), etc.) generate increased interest in these tournaments on Russian television [1, 4, 5]. The leading TV channels – Channel One, Russia-1 and Match! TV – often used their right to the priority broadcast of these competitions or divided it between themselves. After its creation in 2015, the bulk of TV broadcasts of sports programs passed to Match [2], thanks to which biathlon took a leading position in winter sports seasons [3-5]. Other state TV channels (NTV, REN TV, Russia-24, etc.) also broadcast sports programs, but in much smaller volumes.

Objective of the study is to identify the composition and dynamics of indicators of sports programs on

publicly available Russian state television channels in the winter competition seasons of 2021-2024.

Methods and structure of the study. In each of the three winter competition seasons of 2021-24, popular sports programs on Russian state TV channels were determined. For this purpose, according to the data of Mediascop (the leader of the Russian media research market), weekly ratings and number of TV broadcasts in the first hundred popular programs (TV-100) and in the first ten sports programs (TOP-10) were analyzed and summarized. The studies were conducted in Russian cities with a population of 100 thousand; the audience is the population aged 4 years and older [6]. The duration of each winter season was 20 weeks (from mid-November to early April).

Results and conclusions. The main indicators of sports programs in the 2021/22 Olympic season on Russian TV channels are presented in Table 1.



Table 1. Indicators of sports programs in the 2021/22 Olympic season (in brackets – OZI-22 indicators)

No	Sports programs	Sports program with the highest rating	Channel	TV-100	Rating	TOP	TOP-10
1	Biathlon	KM. Relay. Women. (OZI. Pursuit. Women.)	M P	19 (10)	2,3 (5,9)	8	40 (4)
2	Figure skating	KR. Short program. Women. (OZI. Short program. Women.)	P P	22 (13)	3,4 (7,1)	6	40 (12)
3	Football International tournaments	LE. Legia (Poland) – Spartak	M	1	1,7	---	12
	All-Russian tournaments	ChR. CSKA – Zenit	M	1	1,6	2	27
4	Cross-country skiing	KM. Pursuit race. (OZI. Relay. Men.)	M P	1 (12)	1,7 (5,6)	---	30 (9)
5	Information and analytical	All to Match	M	(1)	1,3 (2,3)	---	6
		Biathlon with D. Guberniev and others	M	2	1,8	---	6+6
6	Sports News	Today. Sport	NTV	---	1,2	3	10
		News on Match	M	(1)	1,1 (2,3)	---	4
		News. Sport	P-24	---	1,0	---	3
7	Hockey	CPC. Russia – Finland (OZI. OKR – Sweden. Male)	P P	4 (8)	2,3 (5,2)	1	9 (3)
8	Martial arts	Fight Club. Boxing	REN	---	1,0	---	3
9	Artistic gymnastics	Heavenly Grace	P-1	---	1,3	---	1
10	Motorsport	Formula 1. Qatar Grand Prix.	M	---	0,7	---	1
11	Short track	OZI. Relay. Mixed com.	M	(1)	(2,6)	---	1
12	Freestyle	OZI. Mogul. Qualification.	M	(1)	(2,4)	---	1
13	Mini-football	CH. Russia - Portugal	M	1	1,9	---	1
	TOTAL:			55 (77)		20	200

The data in Table 1 show that in the Olympic season, biathlon and figure skating are the leaders in the number of TOP-10 broadcasts, followed by football. Cross-country skiing is in 4th place, hockey is in 7th place, behind news and information and analytical programs. The list is closed by martial arts, motor racing, short track, freestyle, rhythmic gymnastics and mini-football. The main event of the season is OZI-22, where the maximum ratings were recorded (from 2.3 to 7.1%) in 8 out of 13 sports programs. The result of the season can be considered 132 broadcasts (including 125 in winter sports) in TV-100, which indicates a great interest of Russians in OZI-22 and in winter sports. Knowing the subsequent course of events, it can be argued that the indicators of the Olympic season were the best on Russian sports television for 2021-2024.

But in early March 2022, politics intervened in sports: the IOC Executive Committee suspended Russian athletes from participating in all international competitions due to the start of a special military operation of the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine. This decision led to the fact that interest in sports programs on Russian television has noticeably decreased, as

evidenced by the indicators of the winter competition seasons of 2022-2024, presented in Table 2.

In the conditions of international isolation, the composition of sports programs in each winter season of 2022-2024 was almost no different from the Olympic one and included: football, hockey, figure skating, biathlon, cross-country skiing, martial arts, rhythmic gymnastics, information and analytical and news programs. The replacement of international competition broadcasts with domestic ones in the TV channel broadcasting grid turned out to be unequal, since the ratings of sports programs decreased by 2-3.5 times and amounted, with rare exceptions, from 0.2 to 0.9%. If we take into account the indicators of Olympic broadcasts, then the decrease (especially in winter sports) is even greater – 5-8 times.

Cross-country skiing “sagged” most noticeably: after 30 broadcasts in the Olympic season, only 7 and 9 hits in the TOP-10. Biathlon and figure skating (the flagships of Match! TV and Channel One) were inferior not only to football but also to hockey in the number of TOP-10 broadcasts, and in the 22/23 season to informational, analytical and news programs about sports. Hockey is the only representative of winter sports that



managed to increase the number of TOP-10 broadcasts: from 9 to 21 and then to 34. The crisis situation was smoothed out by broadcasts of the final tournament of the World Cup in football (November 20 – December 18, 2022).

Even without the participation of the Russian team, it aroused great interest in the country: all 64 games were broadcast on Match, 44 were included in TV-100, 5 became TOP leaders, and the rating of the final was higher than on OZI-22 (respectively – 8.1% and 7.1%). Taking into account the broadcast of other international and all-Russian tournaments, football has become the leader among sports programs in the win-

ter seasons of 2022-24 on Russian sports television, displacing biathlon and figure skating from the leading positions. The increase in the number of broadcasts in the TOP-10 over three seasons is observed in news programs: 17, 24 and 29 broadcasts, respectively.

The progress of the “Segodnya. Sport” broadcast on NTV is especially noticeable, which occupied the TOP positions 3, 8 and 9 times and was included in the TV-100 twice. Information and analytical programs also have good indicators – 48 (18 + 20 + 10) broadcasts, of which 22 is the broadcast of the “Vse na Match” program. The rest are author’s information and analytical programs about football and biathlon

Table 2. Indicators of sports programs on Russian television for two winter competition seasons of 2022-24.

No	Sports programs	Sports program with the highest rating	Channel	TV-100	Rating	TOP	TOP-10
Winter competition season 2022/23							
1	Football World Cup	Argentina – France	M	44	8,1	5	33
	Int. tournaments	Real – Barcelona	M	---	0,7	1	20
	All-Russian tournaments	TM. Iran – Russia	M	---	1,2	1	28
2	Sports news	Today. Sport	NTV	1	1,3	8	16
		News. Sport	P-24	---	0,6	---	6
		News on Match	M	---	0,4	---	4
3	Hockey	KHL. SKA – CSKA	M	---	0,8	---	21
4	Information and analytical	All to Match	M	---	0,6	---	10
		Rest	M	1	1,7	---	10
5	Figure skating	CR. Short program. Women.	P	10	2,6	4	17
6	Biathlon	CR. Relay	M	---	0,7	---	17
7	Martial arts	Fight Club. Boxing	REN	---	0,8	---	9
8	Cross-country skiing	CV. Team Sprint	M	---	0,6	---	7
9	Artistic gymnastics	Heavenly Grace	P-1	---	1,3	1	1
10	Volleyball	CR. Zenit – Zenit (Kazan)	M	---	0,2	---	1
	TOTAL:			56		20	200
Winter competition season 2023/24							
1	Football International tournaments	Real – Barcelona	M	---	0,7	---	28
	All-Russian tournaments	CR. Zenit – Spartak	M	---	1,3	4	25
2	Hockey	KHL. SKA – Avtomobilist	M	---	0,9	---	34
3	Figure skating	CR. Short program. Women.	P	2	1,8	5	31
4	Sports news	Today. Sport	NTV	1	2,3	9	18
		News on Match	M	---	0,7	---	8
		News. Sport	P-24	---	0,5	---	3
5	Biathlon	KR. Pursuit race. Women.	M	---	0,7	1	28
6	Information and analytical	All to Match	M	---	0,6	---	6
		Rest	M	---	0,4	---	4
7	Cross-country skiing	KR. Mass start	M	---	0,7	---	9
8	Martial arts	Boxing. D. Bivol – L. Arthur	P	---	0,5	---	4
9	Artistic gymnastics	Heavenly Grace	P-1	1	1,4	1	1
10	Billiards	Super League. Doubles Tournament	M	---	0,4	---	1
	TOTAL:			4		20	200



on the same “Match”. Overall, the total share of informational, analytical and news programs about sports remains at 20% among the TOP-10 for all three winter seasons of 2021-2024.

Conclusions:

1. The composition of sports programs on Russian state TV channels in the winter competition seasons of 2021-2024 was almost constant and included broadcasts of competitions in football, hockey, biathlon, figure skating, cross-country skiing, martial arts, rhythmic gymnastics, as well as informational, analytical and news programs about sports.

In the winter season of 21/22, the indicators of sports programs were the best for 2021-2024, as evidenced by high ratings and 132 broadcasts in TV-100. Biathlon, hockey, figure skating and cross-country skiing accounted for 89 broadcasts (67.4%) in TV-100 and 119 in the TOP-10 (almost 60%). The maximum ratings were recorded on OZI-22 and amounted to: in hockey – 5.2; in cross-country skiing – 5.6; in biathlon – 5.9 and in figure skating – 7.1%.

2. The disqualification of Russian athletes and the subsequent replacement of international competition broadcasts with domestic ones in the broadcasting schedule of state TV channels became the main reasons for the decline in interest of Russians in sports programs in the winter seasons of 2022-24. Thus, ratings decreased by 2-3.5 times (from OZI-22 – by 5-8 times), and the number of sports broadcasts included in TV-100 decreased sharply: from 132 in the Olympic season to 56 in the 22/23 season and to 4 in the 23/24 season.

3. Two years without the participation of Russian athletes in international competitions had a particularly negative impact on the performance of winter sports. The only one who gained in this situation was the “king of sports” – football. Thanks to the broadcasts of the final tournament of the World Cup-22, it becomes the

leader of sports programs on Russian television in the winter seasons: 44 broadcasts in TV-100 (all from the World Cup-22), 81 broadcasts in the TOP-10 and 7 TOP positions in the 22/23 season; 51 broadcasts in the TOP-10 and 4 TOP positions in the 23/24 season. The rating of the final match at the World Cup-22 was 8.1%, which is the highest figure among all sports programs in the winter seasons of 2021-24. In conclusion, it should be noted that the Russian sports TV channel Match, together with the sports federations responsible for the development of winter sports, are doing everything possible to minimize the consequences of sanctions from the IOC.

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