

# MYOPIC VIEW: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON MIXING SPORTS AND POLITICS

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Last Wednesday's [decision by Wimbledon to decline entries from Russian and Belarusian players](#) for the 2022 edition of the world's premier tennis tournament has opened a can of worms. With the [Russia-Ukraine war](#) raging, the All England Club stated that "it would be unacceptable for the Russian regime to derive any benefits from the involvement of Russian or Belarusian players with The Championships". Even as the Club acknowledged it was hard on individual athletes, chairman Ian Hewitt said "they will suffer for the actions of the leaders of the Russian regime". It will affect dozens of players including men's World No.2 and reigning US Open champion Daniil Medvedev, World No.8 Andrey Rublev, women's World No.4 Aryna Sabalenka and two-time Major winner Victoria Azarenka. The move was by no means unique; in March, World Athletics had similarly ostracised Russian and Belarusian athletes. But Wimbledon's decision was unprecedented because unlike other sports, tennis more or less transcends nationalism. Except in team events such as the Davis Cup and the Billie Jean King Cup — from which Russia is currently banned — players' entry into a tournament is based solely on ranking and not nationality. Criticism from legends like Billie Jean King and Martina Navratilova was rooted in this fact, so was the pushback from ATP and WTA, the governing bodies of the men's and women's tours.

That Wimbledon could act unilaterally has much to do with tennis' splintered administration. There is no umbrella organisation that directs the sport; the four Majors, ATP, WTA and International Tennis Federation act independently. There is not an autonomous players' union either. Shorn of checks and balances, Wimbledon, to seemingly avoid the optics of a Russian or Belarusian player holding aloft the trophy — a genuine possibility considering Sabalenka was a semifinalist in 2021 — thought it was best to impose a blanket ban. But this militates against the principle of fairness and equal opportunity and may force the ATP and WTA to strip the event of ranking points, turning it into a glorified exhibition tournament. The episode also brings into focus the role of the British government, whose guidelines Wimbledon said it had taken into account. Last month, Sports Minister Nigel Huddleston demanded that Russian players attest "they were not supporters of Vladimir Putin", despite Medvedev and Rublev publicly calling for peace. In fact, Mr. Huddleston's view was similar to the one espoused by Ukrainian players led by Elina Svitolina, a two-time Grand Slam semifinalist. While one can empathise with the Ukrainians' feelings, considering their tragic lived experiences, it sets a damaging precedent when nations start penalising individual citizens for the actions of political leaders. It appears that both Wimbledon and the British government do not want to see the wood for the trees.

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