

Social and Political Resonance of Danylo Myhal's Protest Action at the 1976 Montreal Olympics

Serhiy Kulyk, PhD in Political Science,
Associate Professor, International Relations Faculty,
Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University (Ukraine),
ORCID: 0000-0001-7520-7426

Spectators and politically active citizens sometimes use sports matches as a place to express various forms of protest. Such several political actions against the Soviet government took place during the XXI Summer Olympic Games in Montreal (Canada, 1976). Their initiators and executors were representatives of the Ukrainian Diaspora, and these actions became public abroad.

The purpose of the research is to analyze the social and political resonance of D. Myhal's (*ukr.: Данило Мигаль*) action at the Olympic Games in Montreal.

In 2015 a Ukrainian journalist M. Kniazhytskyi accidentally found a video on the Internet and aired it on the program "Evening with Mykola Kniazhytskyi" (*TBI* TV channel). The video showed how a fan ran out on the field in an embroidered shirt and with the flag of Ukraine on July 27, 1976 at the stadium in Montreal during the semifinal football match between the national teams of the GDR and the USSR. He danced hopak in front of the cameras. Even the author of the act, a 20-year-old Canadian of Ukrainian descent D. Myhal, a college student, did not know about this video. He later explained that "he wanted to dramatize the fate of the Ukrainian people and support Ukrainian football players" (*Ukrayinskyi prapor i hopak na olimpiyskomu stadioni, 1976*).

After the Second World War, a movement arose in the Diaspora for the participation of Ukrainian athletes in the status of an independent team in the Olympic competitions, and the movement members substantiated the thesis of "sports colonialism". Therefore, the Olympic Games served as a good media occasion for information actions of Ukrainian organizations in the free world in order to draw attention to various social and political problems in the USSR. The Ukrainian Diaspora had planned a system of events before, during and after the Olympic Games in Montreal, namely, to hang blue-and-yellow flags during competitions, to distribute information materials to the guests of the Olympics, to call for the release of Ukrainian political prisoners, to hold thematic exhibitions and press conferences (*Siromskyi R., 2019*).

The two anti-Soviet actions at the 1976 Summer Olympic Games, which were initiated by Ukrainians individually and without the consent of the leadership, received the greatest resonance in the world. First, on July 22, 1976, during a handball competition between the USSR and Romania, a 22-year-old student from Toronto, Lyubomyr Shukh, unfurled a blue-and-yellow flag. He was detained and even his documents were about to be submitted to court. Later, a spokesman for the Organizing Committee of the Olympic Games explained that L. Shukh's action showed signs of a political protest, and the Ukrainian flag "could have led to riots". The second is the act of D. Myhal

who defined his ideological convictions as follows: “I did not understand why Ukrainian athletes should perform under someone else's flag. Many of our compatriots had won Olympic medals for the USSR. I considered this an injustice and wanted the Ukrainian flag to be raised in honor of the victories of the Ukrainians. Especially since the Olympics are covered by many media. It seemed to me that my action would not remain in the shadows and the world would pay attention to the fact that Ukraine could be an independent state”. He explained the motives of his action by the fact that “many players of Dynamo Kyiv played in the USSR national football team, so I decided to make my race at a football match”. “It seemed to me that Ukrainian players in the national team of the Union would be pleased to see the Ukrainian flag directly on the field. I just wanted to draw attention and remind everyone that Ukraine is independent and has its own symbols” (*Kuzmyak L., 2018*). However, D. Myhal admits: “My action was spontaneous. I was guided only by the desire to get on the broadcast, so that the Ukrainian flag could be seen by the whole world”.

D. Myhal brought this flag from home, from Thunder Bay. It had been with him as well when he as a member of the Ukrainian Youth Union had taken part in organized protests against the USSR at the Olympic Games in Munich four years before.

There were nine *Dynamo* players in the starting lineup of the USSR national team. In the 1975 season, the club won the USSR Championship, the Cup Winners' Cup and the UEFA Super Cup, and the team was led by the coaching duo of V. Lobanovskyi and O. Bazylevych. As for the players of the USSR Olympic team, L. Buryak, who, judging by the broadcast footage, was closest to D. Myhal directly on the field, “does not remember the details of that episode with the man running out with the flag”, but admits that “in fact there were a lot of such moments in Montreal. We were met even when we were leaving training. We felt support every day, we saw people in embroidered shirts with Ukrainian flags. However, the Soviet regime acted – we were followed by the right people, so there could not be much communication” (*Kuzmyak L., 2018*).

I believe that this D. Myhal's action did not have a direct impact on the players, coaches of the team and Ukrainians in the USSR. However, it was added to the reasons for the unsuccessful performance of the USSR national team at the Games. This action served as a proof of the strong activity of the Ukrainian Diaspora in the North America, its search for attempts to establish contacts with Ukrainian athletes, to convey the idea of independence of Ukraine and its sports to international sports authorities. The Soviet side tried to prevent such “hostile acts”, so it put pressure on Canadian law enforcement agencies in order to disrupt the activities planned by Canadian Ukrainians and to punish the “guilty”. Instead, the Canadian police did not apply any sanctions to D. Myhal. At the beginning of 2018 D. Myhal lived in Ontario (Canada). He kept the flag at home in Thunder Bay, and dreamt of transferring it to the museum of Lviv's Carpathians or Kyiv's Dynamo.

Table 1. Social and political resonance of Danylo Myhal's action

Aspects	Explanation
<i>On the stadium</i>	
Spectators	A record number of tickets was sold for the match – 57,182.
Match	Up to 70 minutes the match score was 2:0 in favor of the GDR players.
The course of the action	<p>“Among the spectators there were more than 150 young Ukrainians who hung the Ukrainian flag – 30 feet long – and who stood dressed in their embodied shirts with the written slogan “Freedom to Ukraine””. D. Myhal planned his protest on his own. He reached the central circle and, waving the blue-and-yellow flag of Ukraine and shouting the words “Freedom to Ukraine!”, he performed several elements of hopak. The action lasted 15 seconds.</p> <p>The audience began to applaud. The referee stopped the match. D. Myhal was detained by police in the field, and surrounded he left the stadium, while carefully hiding the flag in his bosom.</p>
Commentator's reaction	<p>“Oh, it is interesting, I guess he is a GDR fan. The colors of his flag seem to confirm this, but he dances in the Soviet style. As the audience greets him with applause, the police intervene, but politely. Yes, sometimes football causes, like other sports, enthusiasm, but still it is a pity that we have to interrupt the match. But in any case, he managed to outplay the attention of the stadium security...”.</p>
<i>Actions of authority representatives</i>	
Montreal police	<p>D. Myhal: “I was taken to the police station, where I spent several hours. There I was asked a few questions about the motives of my action. Later a man in civilian clothes came and said he was a police officer with The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). He turned out to know Ukrainian. He took me aside and asked, “Why are you causing us trouble? Your action will change nothing”.</p> <p>The police called the father and identified him. D. Myhal: “Later Stepan Bandera's son Andriy came to the police station and released me from the police. He was accompanied by a lawyer named Lyubomyr. They talked to the police and released me, without charge”. (*A. Bandera was an accredited journalist at the Summer Olympic Games as a representative of the Canadian news agency in Toronto. He repeatedly tried to get in touch with representatives of the USSR delegation).</p>
The USSR authority	In the Soviet Union, the blue-and-yellow flag was banned and threatened with imprisonment for up to three years. There was the constant pressure on the Canadian law enforcement bodies to punish the perpetrators.
Media coverage	<p>Canada: The Montreal Sports Channel showed this story.</p> <p>USSR: The match was broadcast on tape, so this episode was censored.</p>
<i>Action consequences</i>	
Ukrainian Diaspora	<p>D. Myhal's individual action is a separate action in a number of other information and political protests of the Ukrainian Diaspora, held during the Summer Olympic Games in Montreal. It was directed against “the Soviet-Russian sports prison of the peoples and all those who support or conceal its actions”.</p> <p>After the Olympic Games, the Ukrainian Diaspora newspaper <i>Svoboda</i> (USA) published an article about the incident. The <i>Ukrainian Weekly</i> wrote about this case and other attempts by the Diaspora to arouse national feelings in Ukrainian athletes from the USSR.</p>
Sports	After this action, the USSR team was finally closed to the public and the

	<p>press and all contacts were made impossible.</p> <p>Footballers of the GDR national team became the champions of the Olympics, the USSR team won bronze. Failure in the semifinals strengthened the impression of political action. Coaches V. Lobanovsky and O. Bazylevych were fired from working with the national team (<i>Symchenko A. and Lytvynov D., 2015</i>).</p>
Public sentiment in the USSR	<p>A Ukrainian writer O. Zabuzhko: “This dress code, “embroidered shirt and jeans” (“a dissident style”), nota bene, in the then Kiev existed, but after 1973 it was allowed only by the most cheeky “hippies” (<i>Flag Ukrainy na futbolnom pole Monrealya-76, 2015</i>).</p>
Interpretation of the action	
1967	<p>“It was almost the first time that the whole world saw the Ukrainian flag”.</p>
Independent Ukraine	<p>Positive assessments: “that guy can be considered the first striker at the matches of the USSR national team, at least recorded on video”, “our dancing boy”, “the first representative of the Ukrainian ultras”.</p>
Russian propaganda	<p>The dissemination of Russian fakes is about “our” (Soviet) sports and “our” team. Insulting and ironic attitude: from “disco-hopak dancer” to focusing attention that D. Myhal’s father, Bohdan, was a doctor in the SS Halychyna division, and his father’s older brother, Roman, was a member of the OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists), a S. Bandera’s deputy in the OUN propaganda department, the commander of the regional OUN combat intelligence department”, and the “world media were quite indifferent to the actions of a Ukrainian patriot from Canada”. An example of such a publication is “How Ukrainian nationalists in pants and without helped our athletes” (<i>NeFIFA</i>).</p>

Consequently, in Soviet times, the demonstration of the Ukrainian flag was a sign of disobedience, and outside the Union such actions were considered bold and daring. Therefore, the Soviet authorities tried to securely hide information about any actions that demanded the political independence of Ukraine, which were constantly and consistently organized by representatives of the Ukrainian Diaspora abroad. It was D. Myhal’s action, due to getting on TV and, therefore, preserved for future generations that caused a certain socio-political resonance abroad. In the conditions of modern Russian aggression in Ukraine, representatives of the “Russian warfare” try to desecrate this act in every possible way.

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