

Do Innocents Pay the Price?¹

On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine in an escalation of long-standing tensions between the nations. The ongoing conflict has caused humanitarian problems including food shortages and a refugee crisis. In response to the conflict, the U.S. and European Union nations have pledged billions of dollars in military support to the project of defending Ukrainian sovereignty. Individuals and organizations, for their part, have refused to carry Russian vodka in restaurants, liquor stores, or bars and have refused to play pieces by Russian composers, just to name a few examples. Additionally, Western nations have implemented an aggressive series of escalating sanctions against both the Russian state and individual powerful oligarchs. In one such case of private sanctions, Wimbledon, the oldest and perhaps most prestigious tennis tournament in the world, has banned Russian and Belarusian athletes. Wimbledon's ban impacts a handful of top players including Daniil Medvedev, the number two ranked men's tennis player, and Aryna Sabalenka, the number four ranked women's tennis player.²

A representative of Wimbledon explains: "Given the profile of the Championships in the United Kingdom and around the world, it is our responsibility to play our part in the widespread efforts of government, industry, sporting and creative institutions to limit Russia's global influence through the strongest means possible."³ The statement continues: "In the circumstances of such unjustified and unprecedented military aggression, it would be unacceptable for the Russian regime to derive any benefits from the involvement of Russian or Belarusian players with the Championships." Ian Hewitt, Chairman of the All England Club, offered words of consolation: "We recognize that this is hard on the individuals affected, and it is with sadness that they will suffer for the actions of the leaders of the Russian regime."

The Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) condemned Wimbledon's decision as undermining the merit-based ranking system in tennis and stripped players' ranking points earned at the competition. The ATP explained its reasoning: "Discrimination based on nationality also constitutes a violation of our agreement with Wimbledon that states that player entry is based solely on ATP rankings." Novak Djokovic, the top-ranked men's player who lived through the NATO bombardment of Serbia, describes the decision as "...crazy. The players, the tennis players, the athletes have nothing to do with [war]. When politics interferes with sport, the result is not good." Martina Navratilova, a nine-time Wimbledon champion, says "as much as I feel for the Ukrainian players and Ukrainian people," excluding players is "unfair" and "not helpful."⁴

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. To what extent, if any, are individuals responsible for the actions of their governments?
2. To what extent is it permissible for international institutions to signal support for certain causes?
3. Even during times of political conflict, is there a role for international sporting organizations to remain places for players to demonstrate peaceful interaction?
4. How do the consequences of these bans matter for their morality?

¹ A version of this case appears in the APPE Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl's® 2022 [Regional Case Set](#). It is reproduced here with permission. For more information about APPE IEB®, visit <https://www.appe-ethics.org/about-ethics-bowl>.

² <https://www.npr.org/2022/04/20/1093741869/wimbledon-russian-players>

³ https://www.wimbledon.com/en_GB/news/articles/2022-04-20/statement_regarding_russian_and_belarusian_individuals_at_the_championships_2022.html

⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/leeigel/2022/04/26/wimbledon-ban-on-russian-and-belarusian-players-erves-points-about-sports-and-politics/?sh=11e9d161473e>

