

UZBEKISTAN'S GOLDEN ERA IN SPORTS: FROM TOKYO TO THE WORLD STAGE

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Abstract

This article analyzes the transformational evolution of the Republic of Uzbekistan's sports sector since independence, with a particular focus on its growing international achievements. Specifically, it examines the record-breaking results attained at the 2020 Tokyo and 2024 Paris Olympic Games, the advancement of women's sports, and Uzbekistan's first-ever qualification for the FIFA World Cup. It also discusses the effectiveness of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's sports reforms, youth policies, and gender equality initiatives. Moreover, the article explores the social-psychological, cultural, and diplomatic functions of sports, emphasizing Uzbekistan's emergence as a new global sporting brand and symbol of national pride.

Key words

Uzbekistan sports, Olympic Games, World Cup, youth policy, reforms, Mirziyoyev, sports diplomacy, national brand, women's sports, youth development.

Introduction. Since gaining independence, Uzbekistan has made sports a cornerstone of its national identity, public health, and global image. Over the past decade, the country has witnessed a profound transformation in this sector, turning sports into an essential part of its socio-political and cultural life. Under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's leadership, sports have evolved beyond physical training to become a manifestation of national consciousness, patriotism, and state branding.

Today, Uzbekistan is recognized as an emerging power on the world sports map. The achievements at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics were strengthened at Paris 2024, and the nation's first-ever qualification for the FIFA World Cup symbolizes not just victory, but a new chapter in Uzbekistan's sporting history. This article explores the psychological, social, and political dimensions of this transformation.

Tokyo 2020: The Foundation of a Modern Sports System. Held under the shadow of the global pandemic, the Tokyo 2020 Olympics became both a test and a

triumph for Uzbekistan. Its athletes claimed three gold and two bronze medals, demonstrating the maturity and resilience of the national sports system.

During this period, the structure of national sports federations was reformed, foreign coaches were invited, and Olympic reserve schools were established for youth. As a result, Uzbekistan excelled in its traditional strengths – boxing, wrestling, and taekwondo. The victories of Hasanboy Dusmatov and Bakhodir Jalolov, in particular, turned Uzbekistan into a symbol of “fighting spirit” on the Olympic stage.

The Tokyo Games were not merely a sporting milestone but the starting point of a systemic national reform. They signaled a new phase in state policy, financing, and international sports integration.

Paris 2024: The Golden Peak of Uzbek Sports. The 2024 Paris Olympics marked the brightest chapter in Uzbekistan’s sporting history. The country achieved a record total of 13 medals – 8 gold, 3 silver, and 2 bronze – ranking 13th overall, ahead of established powers such as Spain, Brazil, and South Korea.

The most remarkable feat came from men’s boxing: Uzbekistan captured five gold medals, a record-breaking performance unprecedented in Olympic history. Hasanboy Dusmatov, Abdumalik Khalokov, Asadkhuja Muydinkhujaev, Lazizbek Mullojonov, and Bakhodir Jalolov became national heroes, dominating the Grand Palais and cementing Uzbekistan’s legacy in world boxing.

Equally groundbreaking was Diyora Keldiyorova’s historic gold medal in judo – the first ever for an Uzbek woman and for any Central Asian female athlete. Her victory was not only a personal triumph but also a transformative moment for gender equality and women’s empowerment in Uzbek sports.

Meanwhile, Ulugbek Rashitov successfully defended his Olympic title in taekwondo, and Razambek Jamalov captured gold in freestyle wrestling, affirming Uzbekistan’s status as a global powerhouse in combat sports.

A Historic Turning Point in Football: The Road to the World Cup. The long-standing dream of Uzbek football finally came true when the national team qualified for the 2026 FIFA World Cup – the first time in history. This achievement made Uzbekistan the first Central Asian nation and only the third post-Soviet state (after Russia and Ukraine) to reach football’s biggest tournament.

This milestone was the result of long-term strategic investment in sports policy. Since 2017, youth football academies, scouting systems, and infrastructure programs have been systematically developed. Their success was evident when Uzbekistan’s U-23 “White Wolves” qualified for the 2024 Paris Olympic football tournament, earning respect for their tactical discipline and fearless play against elite teams.

The qualification for the 2026 World Cup represents more than a sporting victory – it signifies cultural achievement, national identity, and the coming of age of a young nation that gained independence just three decades ago.

A New Generation of Global Athletes: The Rise of Abduqodir Khusanov. Uzbekistan's new generation of athletes embodies the spirit of ambition, discipline, and global mindset. One of the most vivid examples is Abduqodir Khusanov, who, in early 2025, transferred from RC Lens (France) to Manchester City (England), becoming the first Uzbek footballer in the English Premier League. His journey from Tashkent's youth academies to one of the world's most prestigious clubs symbolizes the modernization and internationalization of Uzbekistan's sports management system. Khusanov's success represents the emergence of a new model – the “professional global athlete” – combining local talent with international standards of professionalism and psychology.

President Mirziyoyev's Reforms: Restoring Sports as a National Identity. Uzbekistan's sports renaissance is no coincidence. At its core lie the comprehensive reforms implemented by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev since 2017. His administration has integrated sports into the broader vision of national development and human capital growth.

The reforms include:

- Modernization of sports infrastructure: construction of new stadiums, swimming complexes, and Olympic schools across all regions.
- Promotion of gender equality: introduction of policies supporting women's sports and leadership opportunities.
- Youth development programs: scholarships, grants, and talent identification initiatives for young athletes.
- International cooperation: engagement of foreign coaches, sports scientists, and partnerships with global federations.

President Mirziyoyev has consistently emphasized that “Sport is a reflection of a nation's confidence, unity, and progress.” The achievements at Paris 2024 and the World Cup qualification vividly embody this philosophy – turning policy into performance.

The Social and Cultural Dimensions of Uzbekistan's Sports Rise. The current rise of Uzbek sports goes far beyond medal counts. It signifies the revival of national identity, the strengthening of patriotism, and the promotion of social harmony. Sports have become a major factor in enhancing social stability and inclusion. The success of athletes from rural areas symbolizes equality of opportunity and the idea that talent knows no geography. The victories of Uzbek athletes inspire a generation, fostering a collective belief – “If they can, I can too.”

Furthermore, sports have become a key instrument of Uzbekistan's "soft power." Each Olympic triumph, each international competition, and each raised flag contributes to the country's diplomatic visibility and global reputation as a peaceful, ambitious, and forward-looking nation.

Conclusion. The ongoing rise of Uzbekistan's sports represents the synergy of effective state policy, the determination of its people, and the dedication of its youth. The triumphs between Tokyo and Paris, and the historic World Cup qualification, are more than victories – they symbolize a nation's confidence, unity, and aspiration. Uzbekistan today stands as a new brand in world sports – one defined by perseverance, hard work, and national pride. Uzbek athletes are no longer participants; they are global ambassadors of excellence. This golden era in Uzbekistan's sports history is not merely a period of medals and titles, but an age of collective inspiration, identity, and national elevation.

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