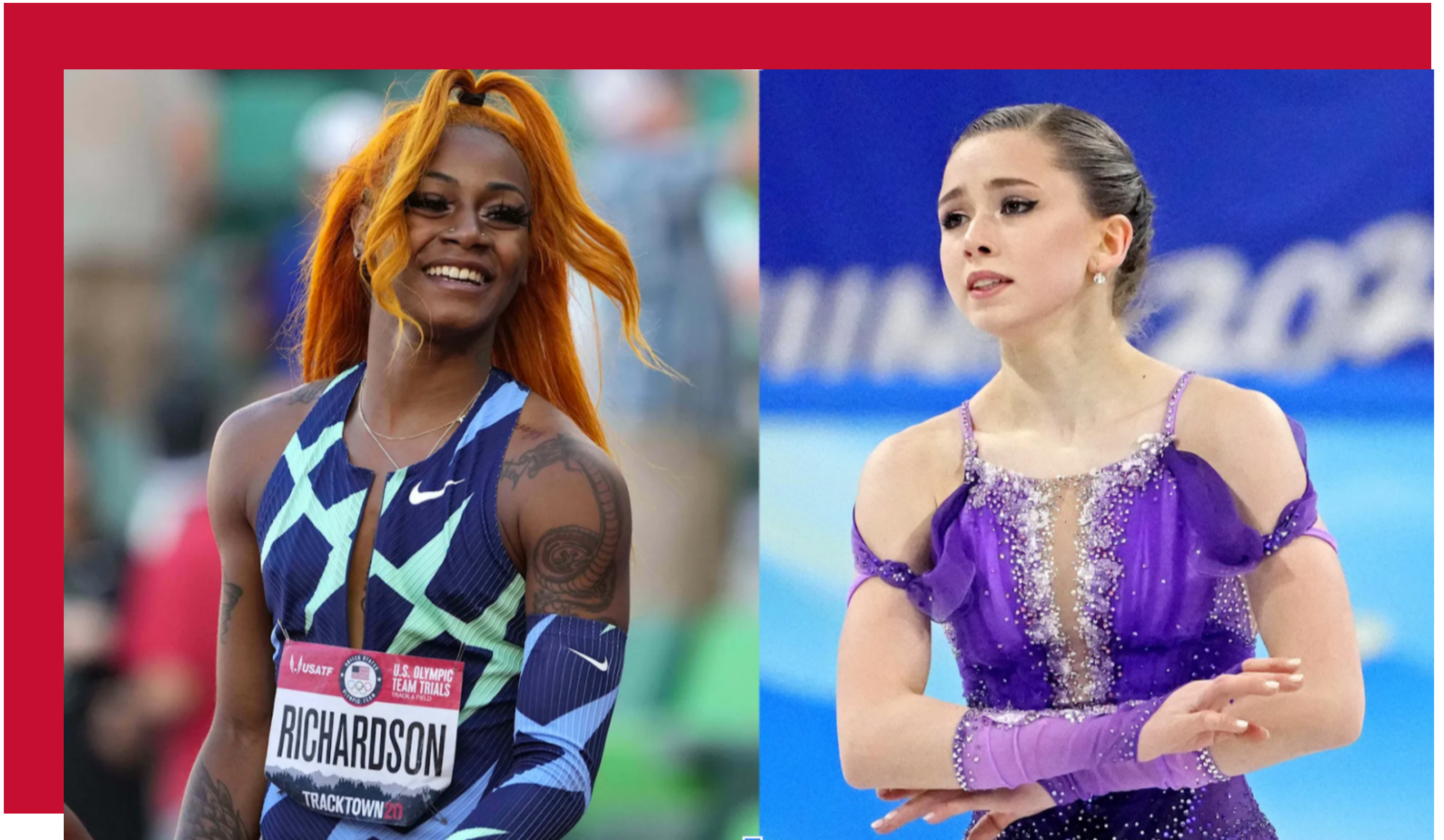


Case Study - Drug Racialization in Olympics: The Black Athlete and White Athlete Were Ruled Differently Because of the Racism in Anti-Doping

By Haoning Zhu



Sha'Carri Richardson (left) and Kamila Valieva (right)

Kamila Valieva, the fifteen-year-old white Russian figure skater, was allowed to continue to compete and pursue her second gold medal in the Beijing 2022 Olympic Games after testing positive for trimetazidine (TMZ), a banned substance in Olympics.

Valieva is an undisputed frontrunner in her sport and had propelled her team to win the gold medal in the figure skating team event before her drug result came out, although the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) hasn't been awarded the medal because of her case.

The Russian Anti-Doping Agency (RUSADA) provisionally suspended Valieva a day after her test results became public. However, a day later, the organization's Disciplinary Anti-Doping Committee canceled the suspension.

On Feb. 14, the Court of Arbitration of Sport (CAS) officially allowed Valieva's continued participation in the Olympics. Valieva returned to the ice on Feb. 15 and posted the best score in the individual women's short program to qualify for the free skating competition on Feb. 17. Yet if she were placed in the top 3, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said it would hold off on medal ceremonies involving Valieva until the doping allegation is resolved, which means neither would any of her competitors receive their medals.

The ruling in Valieva's case raised comparison to another recent Olympic drug testing incident. Sha'Carri Richardson, a black U.S. sprinter who was favored to win her event, was handled very differently when she failed the drug test.

Richardson appeared at the Tokyo Olympics-bound last summer, but she was disqualified from the 100-meter race at the Olympic Games and faced a one-month ban after testing positive for THC, the banned chemical for athletes in cannabis. The 21-year-old black athlete said she used it to cope with her mother's death.

Although Richardson's suspension will be over by the time the Olympic track and field competition begins, the positive test erased her Olympic trials performance in the women's 100, so she lost her shot to compete in the quadrennial Games.

Richardson was calling out the decision of allowing Valieva to continue to compete in the Beijing Games despite testing positive for doping. She sent a series of tweets bringing attention to what appears to be racism bias within the Olympics committees.



“Can we get a solid answer on the difference between her situation and mine?” Richardson [tweeted](#) on Feb. 14. “The only difference I see is I’m a young black lady,” she said.

How Was the Black Athlete Treated Unfairly From the White Athlete?

Differences in the Drug Types

Although both the athletes failed the pre-Games test, the drugs they used may function differently. TMZ may enhance Valieva’s physical efficiency and endurance, while THC may actually reduce Richardson’s performance, given its controversy over its effects on athletes’ performance.

Trimetazidine is a fatty acid oxidation inhibitor used to prevent and treat the symptoms of angina, or chest pain resulting from a lack of blood supply and oxygen to the heart. The drug is banned by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) as it may improve stamina in healthy young athletes.

“The drug can help by improving the efficiency of the heart in being able to deliver blood flow more effectively,” said Dr. Sadiya Khan, a cardiologist at Northwestern Medicine. “And it was extremely unlikely a 15-year-old would be prescribed the drug for heart troubles,” Khan added.

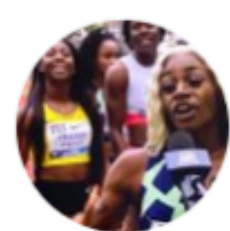
According to documents reviewed by [The New York Times](#) and confirmed by a document filed in Valieva’s arbitration hearing, there are two other substances, besides TMZ, found in Valieva’s sample to an anti-doping laboratory, which can treat the heart but are not on the banned list. Valieva even listed them, Hypoxen and L-carnitine, on a doping control form.

Travis Tygart, the United States Anti-Doping Agency chief executive, said the “trifecta of substances” Valieva took “seem to be aimed at increasing endurance, reducing fatigue and promoting greater efficiency in using oxygen.” Valieva’s mother said her daughter used Hypoxen for heart “variations,” and Valieva [claims](#) she accidentally ingested her grandfather’s TMZ. But no matter for what reason, the banned substance could enhance Valieva’s physical performance in the Games.

On the other hand, Richardson was tested positive for THC, a substance banned by the WADA that has always been controversial. Although WADA found cannabis might help athletes “better perform under pressure and to alleviate the stress experienced before and during competition,” the finding isn’t enough to warrant concluding marijuana is a performance-enhancing drug, argued Alain Steve Comtois, director of the department of sports science at the University of Quebec at Montreal.

Mr. Comtois said WADA has to take the big picture. “Yes, anxiety levels go down, but in terms of actual physiological data, it shows that performance is reduced,” he added.

Richardson also [noted](#) that THC, which she was suspended for consuming, “is not a performance-enhancing drug.”



Sha'Carri Richardson

@itskerrii



Btw THC definitely is not a performance enhance!!!!

7:20 AM · Feb 14, 2022



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Qasim Rashid, Esq. ✓

@QasimRashid

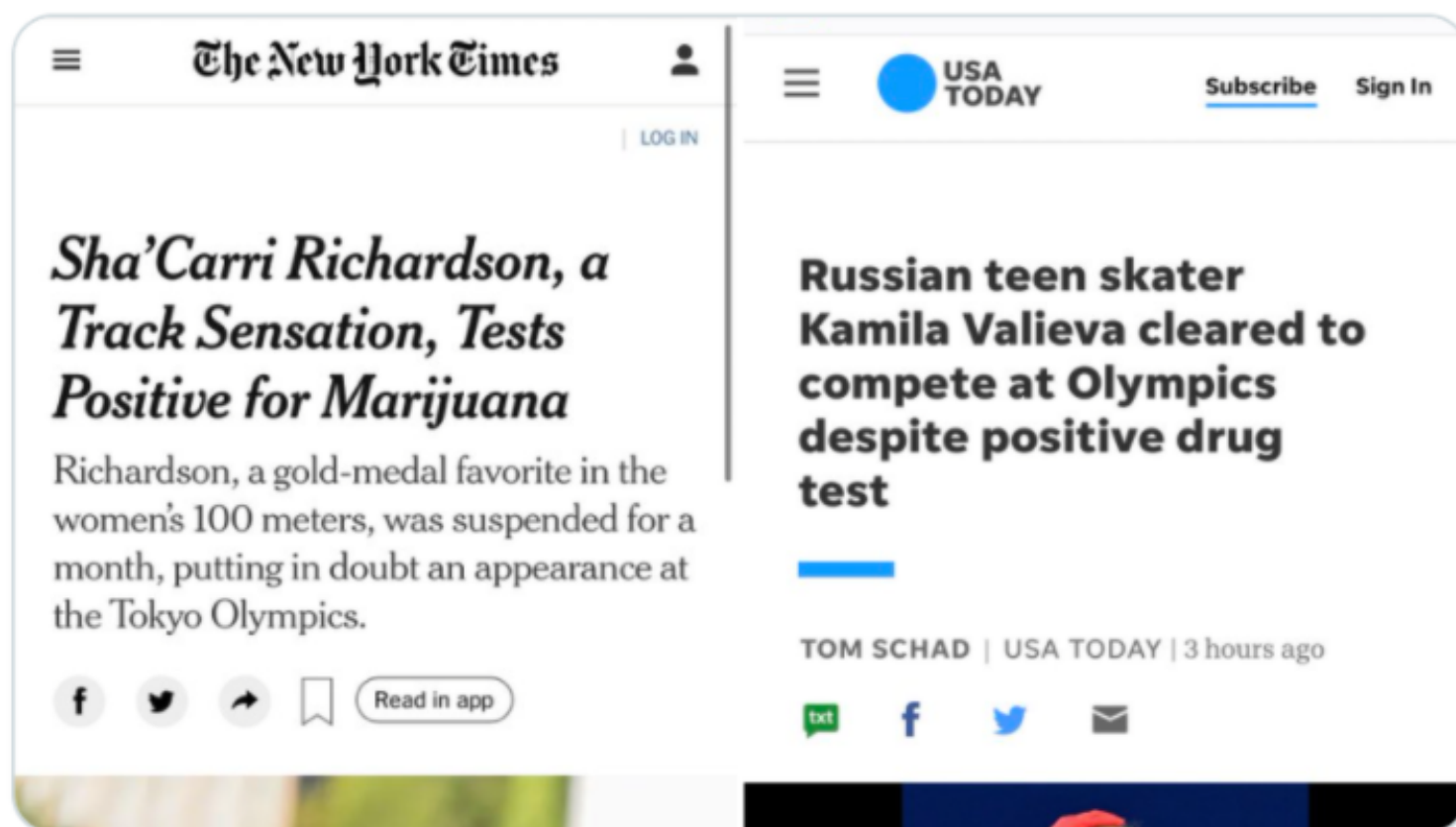
Sha'Carri Richardson: Tests positive for pot (which is not performance enhancing)

- Banned from Olympics

Kamila Valieva: Tests positive for Trimetazidine (which increases blood flow to heart)

- Approved for Olympics

I can't qwhite put my finger on the difference here 🤔



5:50 AM · Feb 14, 2022



[Qasim Rashid](#), a human rights lawyer and an author who has 325.1K followers on Twitter, ironically compared the black athlete's case with the white athlete's case.

Although both Richardson and Valieva were wrong in using banned substances of WADA, TMZ may enhance Valieva's sports performance and two other substances helping heart were found in her sample, while THC that Richardson used to cope with her mom's death, which the news was "shocking" and "triggering" to her, may actually reduce her performance. But no matter how, Valieva had led her team to win a gold medal and she was allowed to continue to compete in the

Games, setting up for her attempt to win the second medal in the women's free skate, but the black athlete, Richardson, wasn't able to go on the pitch at the Olympic Games at all.

The Time of the Results Came Out

While noting that Valieva failed the drug test back in December, Richardson asked why the public is just now finding out about it. In December 2021, Valieva submitted a routine doping sample that a laboratory later determined included a banned drug. The test result was not returned for more than six weeks, though, and delivered only after Valieva had competed at the Beijing Olympics.

The Russian Olympics officials said they learned the positive result on Feb. 14, a delay that appeared to violate current anti-doping standards, which require test samples to be returned within 20 calendar days. If Valieva got her positive results in time, she was supposed to be suspended and wouldn't be able to attend the Olympic Games.

“My [result] was posted within a week and my name and talent was slaughtered to the people,” Richardson said in her [tweet](#).

The positive result quickly back to Richardson made her accept the one-month period of ineligibility that began on June 28, 2021, the time right before the Tokyo Olympics began.

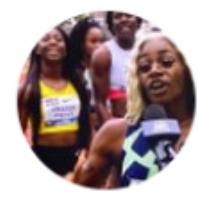
Thus, this time difference that the test results took to come out led the white and black athletes to completely different situations of if they could attend the quadrennial Olympic Games, which are significant to every athlete’s sports career. In this case, Valieva was privileged a lot by the delay of her test result, which was unfair to Richardson and disrespectful to Valieva’s competitors, who got their eligibility to compete in the Games only after passing the drug test.

How Was the Black Athlete Treated Unfairly From the White Athlete?

Although both the athletes tested positive for banned drugs, their situations were completely not the same. The black athlete lost her shot to compete in the Olympics Games, took responsibility for her mistake, and apologized to people who supported her.

“I want to take responsibility for my actions,” Richardson said to NBC’s “TODAY” program. “I’m not looking for an excuse,” she added.

“I would like to say to my fans and my family and my sponsorship, to the haters, too, I apologize,” Richardson said. “As much as I’m disappointed, I know that when I step on that track, I don’t represent myself. I represent a community that has shown me great support, great love.”



Sha'Carri Richardson 
@itskerrii



Failed in December and the world just now know however my resulted was posted within a week and my name & talent was slaughtered to the people.

7:27 AM · Feb 14, 2022



11K



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However, Valieva has never apologized publicly nor explained her case to her fans. The white young lady released her first public comment to Russia's state-run TV network Channel One. "These days have been very difficult for me, and I've run out of emotions," Valieva said. "I'm happy, but emotionally I'm tired."

The Russian Olympic Committee issued a statement defending Valieva and her participation in the Games, saying she had passed doping tests before and after Dec. 25 and at the Games, so that the positive test in question should not apply to her status in Beijing.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS)'s explanation of allowing Valieva to continue her competitions was that she is minor and is a "protected person" subject to different rules than adults. The explanation also cited the delay in reporting the test result and the risk of causing Valieva "irreparable harm" by preventing her from competing.

[Clayton Collier](#), a sports anchor at ABC24 Memphis, spoke out for Richardson on Twitter: "I don't remember anyone considering the 'irreparable harm' of suspending Sha'Carri Richardson for smoking pot to cope with her mother's death."

However, Denis Oswald, permanent chair of the International Olympic Committee, said Valieva's argument was [that] this contamination in her sample happened with a product her grandfather was taking.

"You can imagine a girl of 15 would not do something wrong alone," he added.

He commented that Valieva's case was in "a very special situation" that "Olympic Games take place only every four years, and if she would miss the competition, the damage would not be repaired."

The leniency of allowing Valieva to continue to compete may also disadvantage her competitors who would win medals. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) says it will hold off on medal ceremonies involving Valieva until the doping allegation is resolved, perhaps months from now.

That means, if Valieva places in the top 3, she won't receive a medal, and neither will any of the medalists in the women's free skate competition. This decision of potentially withholding medals from clean athletes came hours after a panel of arbitrators declined to reinstate a suspension that most likely would have ended Valieva's Olympics.

Many people in the sport have been frustrated and angered by the decision, saying honest athletes are suffering unjustly because of Valieva's presence in the competition after she failed a drug test.

"It's all just so unfair," said Adam Rippon, a former Olympic skater who is coaching the U.S. figure skater Mariah Bell at the Games. "And now it's also so unfair to all of these ladies because their whole Olympic experience is now wrapped up in controversy."

The WADA expressed "disappointment" in the decision, and said in a statement that the panel had ignored specific provisions of the anti-doping code that governs athletes, and which required a suspension— even for a teenager.

Regarding the [response](#) from the U.S., CEO of the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC), Sarah Hirshland, said, "We are disappointed by the message this decision sends," figuring out that the ruling in Valieva's case denied athletes the right to compete on a "level playing field."



The stark inconsistency in the white and black athletes' cases sparked outrage online, with many calling the ruling unfair and some accusing the International Olympic Committee of racial discrimination.

In [an interview on CNN](#) on Feb.14, former Olympic figure skater Kaitlyn Weaver said her “heart goes out to Sha’Carri Richardson” over the ruling which appeared to be racism.

“What about the people that can’t compete because of the same rules?” Weaver said. “I just don’t understand why we have to treat this case differently.”

“It is all in the skin,” Richardson noted in her [tweet](#).



Sha'Carri Richardson ✓
@itskerrii



It's all in the skin

7:19 AM · Feb 14, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

918 Retweets **98** Quote Tweets **5,441** Likes

This is my part of work in a group think tank project about drug racialization in the civic engagement writing class. Read the whole think tank project at:
https://www.canva.com/design/DAE6_yeBNVI/HHIP8-vfFXjF2rYQmAktSA/view?utm_content=DAE6_yeBNVI&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=sharebutton

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