



Fallen Athletes, Silenced Tributes:

**A Biographical Record of the 22 Ukrainian Athletes and Sports Figures
on Vladyslav Heraskevych's Banned Olympic Helmet**

Research Report

Draft

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Abstract

At the 2026 Milano-Cortina Winter Olympic Games, Ukrainian skeleton racer Vladyslav Heraskevych wore a custom helmet bearing the black-and-white portraits of 22 Ukrainian athletes and sports figures killed during Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) banned the helmet from competition under Rule 50.2 of the Olympic Charter, classifying it as a political demonstration. When Heraskevych refused to remove the helmet, the IOC disqualified him from the men's skeleton event on race day and revoked his accreditation. This report provides comprehensive biographical profiles of all 22 individuals depicted on the helmet, documenting their athletic achievements, the circumstances of their deaths, and available references for further research. The 22 individuals range in age from 9 to 42 years old; seven were children under 18. They represent disciplines spanning figure skating, boxing, biathlon, cycling, hockey, kickboxing, diving, wrestling, fencing, track and field, shooting, dancesport, strongman athletics, weightlifting, rhythmic gymnastics, judo, ballroom dance, football, and martial arts. Their deaths occurred between March 2022 and December 2025, encompassing both military combatants who volunteered for service and civilian children killed by Russian shelling and bombardment. The report also examines the IOC controversy, Heraskevych's disqualification, and the international solidarity response.

Keywords: Ukraine, Olympic Games, IOC Rule 50.2, Vladyslav Heraskevych, fallen athletes, Russia-Ukraine war, Milano-Cortina 2026

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Introduction

Since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, more than 650 Ukrainian athletes and coaches have been killed (RTÉ, 2026; HuffPost, 2026). Ukrainian Sports Minister Matviy Bidnyi provided this figure to international media, and First Deputy PM Yulia Svyrydenko stated publicly: “More than 650 Ukrainian athletes will never stand on an Olympic stage. They were killed by Russians” (HuffPost, 2026). At the 2026 Milano-Cortina Winter Olympics, Ukrainian skeleton racer and flag bearer Vladyslav Heraskevych sought to honor 22 of these individuals by wearing a custom helmet bearing their portraits.

The IOC banned the helmet under Rule 50.2, which prohibits “no kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda” on the field of play (International Olympic Committee, 2024). When Heraskevych refused to comply, the IOC disqualified him from the men’s skeleton event on February 12, 2026—roughly 45 minutes before his race was scheduled to begin—and initially revoked his accreditation. IOC spokesperson Mark Adams had argued that permitting the tribute would set a precedent across conflicts worldwide: “There are 130 conflicts going on in the world. We cannot have 130 different conflicts featured, however terrible they are, during the field of play” (Time, 2026). Heraskevych rejected the IOC’s compromise offer of a plain black armband, stating: “Because of their sacrifice, we are able to compete here as a team. I will not betray them” (NBC News, 2026). After his disqualification, he wrote: “This is the price of our dignity” (ESPN, 2026a).

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy responded: “This truth cannot be inconvenient, inappropriate, or called a ‘political demonstration at a sporting event.’ It is a reminder to the

entire world of what modern Russia is” (Kyiv Post, 2026). Ukraine’s Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha described the disqualification as “a moment of shame,” adding: “The IOC has banned not the Ukrainian athlete, but its own reputation” (NBC News, 2026).

This report provides a comprehensive biographical record of each of the 22 individuals depicted on the helmet, organized in the order they appeared on Heraskevych’s tribute. For each individual, the report documents their athletic career, circumstances of death, and available sources for further research.

The IOC Controversy, Disqualification, and International Response

Heraskevych’s custom “helmet of remembrance” featured only black-and-white portraits—no slogans, text, or political symbols. He wore it during all official training sessions from February 9 through February 11. The IOC notified him on February 9 that the helmet was noncompliant and sent formal letters on February 10 and 11. On February 10, Heraskevych told reporters he would continue wearing the helmet on race day: “I truly believe that we didn’t violate any law and any rules” (CBC, 2026). On the morning of February 12, IOC President Kirsty Coventry personally met Heraskevych at the top of the track. After approximately 10 minutes, she was unable to change his mind. The IOC then disqualified him from competing and initially revoked his accreditation, though Coventry subsequently requested it be reinstated so he could remain at the Games (IOC, 2026).

Speaking to reporters afterward, Coventry said through tears: “No one, no one—especially me—is disagreeing with the messaging. The messaging is a powerful message. It’s a message of remembrance. It’s a message of memory” (ESPN, 2026b). The IOC’s official statement said the decision was made “with regret” and noted that “the IOC was very keen for

Mr Heraskevych to compete” (IOC, 2026). Heraskevych announced he would appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

Ukrainian athletes rallied in solidarity. Luger Olena Smaha wrote “Remembrance is not a violation” on the palm of her glove and displayed it to the camera after her competition (LADbible, 2026). Skier Dmytro Shepiuk displayed “UKR heroes with us” on a small piece of paper after finishing the men’s super-G (Durango Herald/AP, 2026). Latvia’s president, Edgars Rinkevičs, personally visited the Ukrainian team and publicly criticized the IOC’s decision as “simply wrong” (Baltic News Network, 2026; HuffPost, 2026). Latvian Prime Minister Evika Siliņa stated: “Paying tribute is not political propaganda, but humanity” (Baltic News Network, 2026).

Biographical Profiles of the 22 Commemorated Individuals

1. Dmytro Sharpar (1997–2023): Figure Skater

Born December 21, 1997, in Kharkiv, Sharpar competed in pairs figure skating with partner Anastasiya Pobizhenko. They won silver at the 2015/2016 Ukrainian Championship and represented Ukraine at the 2016 Winter Youth Olympic Games in Lillehammer, finishing 10th (Inside the Games, 2023a). Notably, he was Heraskevych’s teammate at those Youth Games. After competitive skating, Sharpar performed in the “Grand” Circus Ice Show. He joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine after Russia’s full-scale invasion and was killed in combat near Bakhmut on January 23, 2023, at age 25 (Newsweek, 2023; Censor.NET, 2023).

2. Pavlo Ishchenko (d. 2025): Strongman and Powerlifting Champion

Born in Hostomel, Kyiv region, Ishchenko was a world and European powerlifting champion across WPC, WPA, and UPC federations. He became the WPA absolute world

champion in 2019 and won the Ukrainian strongman all-around title four consecutive years from 2022 to 2025—remarkably, all during the full-scale war (Ukrinform, 2025a). He combined over a decade of coaching with competition, training numerous athletes to Master of Sport level. His death was announced on October 11, 2025, after he was killed carrying out a combat mission (Obozrevatel, 2025a).

3. Maksym Halinichev (2000–2023): Boxer and Youth Olympic Medalist

Born August 29, 2000, in Romny, Sumy region, Halinichev was one of Ukraine's most promising young boxers. He won gold at the 2017 and 2018 European Youth Championships and a silver medal at the 2018 Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires in the bantamweight division (Voice of America, 2024). In May 2022, he turned down a spot at the European Championships and volunteered for the 25th Separate Airborne Brigade. Wounded twice—including by shrapnel near Bakhmut—he returned to the front each time. He was killed on March 10, 2023, near Kreminna in the Luhansk region at age 22. His body was never recovered. He was posthumously awarded the Order “For Courage” and left behind a young daughter (Navy Times, 2024).

4. Yevhen Malyshev (2002–2022): Biathlete

Born March 10, 2002, in Kharkiv, Malyshev was a member of Ukraine's junior national biathlon team and competed at the 2020 Winter Youth Olympic Games in Lausanne. He was killed on March 1, 2022, defending his hometown of Kharkiv—just nine days before his 20th birthday and only five days after Russia's full-scale invasion began (CNN, 2022). He was among the very first Ukrainian athletes to die in the war. A journalist held up his photo at the 2022 Winter Paralympics in Beijing, creating an iconic image of the war's human cost (Ukrainska Pravda, 2022a).

5. *Andrii Kutsenko (1989–2024): Track Cyclist*

Born December 28, 1989, in Zhovkva, Lviv Oblast, Kutsenko was an International Master of Sports and multi-time Ukrainian national track cycling champion. He represented Ukraine's national team for a decade (2006–2016), competed at European and World Championships, and held national records in the 1 km time trial at 1:02.935 (Cycling Weekly, 2024). Living with his family in Italy when the invasion began, he returned to Ukraine and volunteered for the 47th Separate Mechanized Brigade "Magura." He was killed on July 3, 2024, during a combat mission in Donetsk Oblast at age 34 (Censor.NET, 2024).

6. *Oleksii Lohinov (1999–2023): Hockey Goaltender*

Born November 25, 1999, in Kyiv, Lohinov played hockey at the Sokil Kyiv youth school and became goaltender for HC Bilyi Bars (Bila Tserkva), winning the 2018 Ukrainian Youth Championship (U20) and earning a bronze medal in the adult national championship. He also earned a master's degree from Taras Shevchenko National University and worked as a geography teacher (Sport.ua, 2023). After volunteering for the National Guard's Azov regiment, he was killed on November 8, 2023, in the Luhansk region at age 23, reportedly while running toward a wounded comrade when an artillery shell exploded nearby. He was the only child in his family (Obozrevatel, 2023a).

7. *Karina Bakhur (2007–2025): Kickboxing Champion*

Karina Bakhur was a 17-year-old from Berestyn, Kharkiv Oblast, who had trained at the Peresvit military sports club since age seven. She was a Ukrainian champion in kickboxing, two-time European champion in Cossack combat (2023, 2025), and a World Championship medalist. She earned the title of Master of Sport of Ukraine in 2025 and was preparing for a World Cup in Austria. On the night of November 17–18, 2025, during Russian shelling of Berestyn, she was

struck by shrapnel while running toward a shelter. She died during surgery, 18 days before her 18th birthday (Ukrainska Pravda, 2025a; Ukrinform, 2025b).

8. *Mykyta Kozubenko (d. 2025): Diving Champion and Coach*

Born in Mykolaiv, Kozubenko earned the title of Master of Sport of Ukraine in diving and became a multiple champion and medalist at Ukrainian Championships. He graduated from Petro Mohyla Black Sea State University in 2018 and worked as a diving coach since 2017. He was known for once jumping into a pool fully clothed to rescue a drowning child during training. After the invasion, he joined the National Guard of Ukraine and was killed in action in 2025 at age 31 (Ukrinform, 2025c; Obozrevatel, 2025b).

9. *Roman Polishchuk (1993–2023): Track and Field Athlete*

Born in 1993 in Kyiv, Polishchuk was a track and field athlete specializing in long jump and high jump who graduated from Taras Shevchenko National University. From the first days of the full-scale invasion, he volunteered for the Armed Forces, serving in the 206th Territorial Defense Battalion. He fought in the Kherson and Kharkiv regions before deployment to Bakhmut. He was killed on March 10, 2023, in battles near Bakhmut. Olympic triple jump medalist and MP Olga Saladukha publicly mourned his death. He was the only child in his family (TSN, 2023; ZMINA, 2023).

10. *Andrii Yaremenko (1999–2025): Greco-Roman Wrestler*

Born December 13, 1999, in Zhytomyr, Yaremenko began wrestling at age seven and became a Ukrainian champion (2015), multiple medalist of national championships, and a member of the Ukrainian national team. He placed 10th at the Cadet World Championship and earned a master's degree from Zhytomyr State University. In 2025, he served as a drone operator

in the 115th Separate Brigade of Territorial Defense Forces on the Zaporizhzhia front. He was killed on December 4, 2025—nine days before his 26th birthday—and was buried on the Alley of Glory at Korbutivske City Cemetery in Zhytomyr (Angels of Sport, 2025; Champion, 2025).

11. Taras Shpuk (1991–2025): Invictus Games Coach

Taras Shpuk (callsign “Cherep”/“Skull”), 34, from Ivano-Frankivsk, was a trail runner, ultramarathoner, and cycling enthusiast. A veteran of the 2014 conflict, he joined the “Come Back Alive” foundation in 2019 and became Ukraine’s first certified wheelchair basketball coach and the long-time coach of Ukrainian teams at the Invictus Games and Warrior Games. In spring 2022, he risked his life to evacuate sports equipment from war-torn Irpin, enabling Ukraine’s participation at The Hague Invictus Games. In November 2023, he joined military intelligence (GUR). He was killed on September 17, 2025, during a special operations mission—the first Come Back Alive employee to die in combat since the full-scale invasion. Over 300 people attended his farewell at St. Michael’s Cathedral in Kyiv (Ukrainska Pravda, 2025b; Come Back Alive Foundation, 2025).

12. Fedir Yepifanov (2004–2023): Fencer

Born January 31, 2004, in Kyiv, Yepifanov was a foil fencer who earned the title of Master of Sport of Ukraine and competed at the 2021 Cadet World Championship in Cairo, finishing in the top 16. When the full-scale invasion began—just after his 18th birthday—he immediately volunteered. He was wounded by gunfire in 2022 but returned to service. He was killed on December 11, 2023, by a Russian FPV drone near the village of Verbove in Zaporizhzhia Oblast, one month before his 20th birthday. He was later featured in Ukraine’s “The Revived” AI project at the 2024 Paris Olympics, which used AI technology to tell the

stories of fallen athletes (National Fencing Federation of Ukraine, 2023; Kyiv Independent, 2024).

13. Kateryna Troian (d. 2025): Track Athlete and Drone Operator

Kateryna Troian trained in track and field under coach Iryna Pustovoyt alongside Ukrainian high jump stars Yuliia Levchenko and Iryna Herashchenko. She held degrees in programming and journalism. In spring 2024, at age 32, she joined the 82nd Separate Air Assault Brigade as an FPV drone operator with the callsign “Meow.” In roughly 1.5 years of service, she completed over 1,000 combat drone sorties near Vovchansk, in the Kursk sector, and around Pokrovsk. Her portrait featured in the “Women Defending Ukraine” photo exhibition in London. She was gravely wounded on June 5, 2025, in the Pokrovsk sector and died on June 6, 2025, at Mechnikov Hospital in Dnipro (Ukrinform, 2025d; Ukrainska Pravda, 2025c).

14. Volodymyr Androshchuk (2001–2023): Decathlete

Born January 10, 2001, in Khmelnytskyi Oblast, Androshchuk was a promising decathlete who represented Ukraine at the European U18 Championship (2018) and European U20 Championship (2020, finishing 6th), and won the Ukrainian U20 Championship in 2019. He was considered a potential contender for the 2024 Paris Olympics. After volunteering for the 95th Air Assault Brigade, he was killed on January 25, 2023, by shrapnel near Bakhmut at age 22. Tennis star Elina Svitolina cited his death in her appeal to the IOC to ban Russian athletes from the 2024 Olympics (NBC News, 2024; Inside the Games, 2023b; Ukraine.ua, 2023).

15. Oleksii Khabarov (1994–2025): Shooting Sport Champion

Born circa 1994 in Horishni Plavni, Poltava Oblast, Khabarov was an International Master of Sport in rifle shooting and a member of the Ukrainian national team. He placed 12th at

the 2014 World Junior Championship, set a national record in 10m air rifle (248.5 points, 2017), and as recently as November 2024, won silver at an international tournament in Romania. He founded the “Phoenix” shooting club, coaching children to national medal-winning levels. In August 2023, he voluntarily joined the Armed Forces and trained as a sniper. He was killed on August 19, 2025, near Shakhove in the Pokrovsk district of Donetsk Oblast at age 31. ISSF President Luciano Rossi sent a formal letter of condolences (ISSF, 2025; Ukrainska Pravda, 2025d).

16. Dariia Kurdel (2002–2022): Dancesport Champion

Dariia Kurdel, 20, was a dancesport champion and multiple winner of international competitions. She was a law student at the Kryvyi Rih Faculty of the National University “Odesa Law Academy.” On the morning of July 9, 2022, Russian forces shelled the Inhulets residential area of Kryvyi Rih using multiple launch rocket systems. Dariia was training at an outdoor sports ground with her father when shrapnel struck her heart and liver. She died in intensive care; her father survived after surgery (Ukrainska Pravda, 2022b; Kyiv Independent, 2022).

17. Ivan Kononenko (1983–2025): Strongman and Actor

Born July 26, 1983, in Kyiv, Kononenko was a strongman athlete on legendary Ukrainian strongman Vasyl Virastiuk’s team and appeared in popular Ukrainian television shows and films including *Servant of the People* and *Crazy Wedding*. On the first day of the full-scale invasion, he volunteered for territorial defense. Severely wounded in November 2022, he created his own rehabilitation program, then signed a military contract and became a senior lieutenant commanding a rifle platoon. He voluntarily deployed to the Kursk front in November 2024 and was killed near Nyzhnii Klyn in Kursk Oblast. His funeral was held on December 9, 2025. He was 42 years old and survived by two sons (Ukrainska Pravda, 2025e; Ukrinform, 2025e).

18. Alina Perehudova (2008–2022): Weightlifter, Age 14

Born in 2008 in the Donetsk region, Perehudova was a prodigious young weightlifter and already a candidate for the Ukrainian national team at 14 years of age. In 2021, she won gold at the U17 National Women's Championship in the under-40 kg category despite being three years below the maximum age. She was killed in April 2022 during the siege of Mariupol. She and her mother left their house when an explosion struck; both died from shell fragments at the scene. Her brother, who ran out after them, was shot dead by a Russian sniper. The entire family perished (Ukrainska Pravda, 2022c; NV, 2022; Angels of Sport, n.d.-a).

19. Kateryna Diachenko (2011–2022): Rhythmic Gymnast, Age 11

Note: The original list identifies this athlete as “Karina Diachenko,” but all available sources consistently identify her as Kateryna (Katya) Diachenko. Born in 2011 in Mariupol, she was a talented rhythmic gymnast who dreamed of competing at the Olympics. On the night of March 10, 2022, a Russian aerial bomb struck the house where her family was sheltering. Kateryna and her father Oleksandr died immediately. Her mother Marina and brother Artem were pulled from rubble and hospitalized—but that hospital was subsequently also hit by a Russian airstrike, killing them as well. The entire family was killed. Her coach Anastasia Meshchanenkova wrote that she “was supposed to conquer the world, but died buried in rubble” (Yahoo News, 2022; Angels of Sport, n.d.-b).

20. Viktoriia Ivashko (2014–2023): Judoka, Age 9

Viktoriia (Vika) Ivashko was a 9-year-old judoka who trained at the Judo Master Sports Club in Kyiv. She was killed on June 1, 2023—International Children's Day—during a Russian missile attack on Kyiv's Desnianskyi district. She and her mother died near a bomb shelter that was reportedly locked. Just days before, Vika had won her first competition medals, including a

gold. A widely circulated photograph showed her grandfather sitting for hours beside her body. Olympic judo medalist Dariia Bilodid publicly condemned the International Judo Federation for allowing Russian athletes to compete at the Dushanbe Grand Prix that same weekend (Ukrainska Pravda, 2023a; Inside the Games, 2023c; Obozrevatel, 2023b).

21. Mariia Lebid (2008–2023): Ballroom Dancer, Age 15

Mariia (Mariika) Lebid was a 15-year-old ninth-grade student, ballroom dancer, aspiring musician, and elected president of her student council. She was killed on January 14, 2023, when a Soviet-era Kh-22 anti-ship missile—designed to destroy aircraft carriers—struck a residential apartment building in Dnipro, obliterating two entrances and killing 46 people, including six children. It was one of the deadliest single attacks of the war. The same strike also killed boxing coach Mykhailo Korenovskyi, acrobatics Master of Sport Anastasiia Ihnatenko, and athletics coach Valentyn Vozniuk. President Zelenskyy mentioned Mariia by name in his nightly address (Ukrainska Pravda, 2023b; Kyiv Independent, 2023; UNN, 2026a).

22. Nazar Zui (2009–2022): Boxer and Footballer, Age 13

Nazar Zui was a 13-year-old from Makiivka who took up boxing before moving to Mariupol, where he became passionate about football and joined a local team. He was an eighth-grade student at School No. 25. On March 11, 2022, a Russian aircraft dropped a bomb on the apartment building at 127 Prospekt Myru, where Nazar's family had sought shelter in the basement after earlier shelling destroyed their home. Nazar and both his parents were killed instantly when a concrete slab collapsed on them. His aunt later traveled to Mariupol to identify the bodies at a makeshift morgue. He is survived by grandparents, an aunt, and a cousin (RBC-Ukraine, 2026; UNN, 2026b).

Discussion

The 22 individuals on Heraskevych's helmet represent a cross-section of the war's toll on Ukrainian sport. Their ages ranged from 9 years old (Viktoriia Ivashko) to 42 (Ivan Kononenko). Seven were children under 18. Several were Youth Olympic participants or medalists who represented the future of Ukrainian athletics. Multiple profiles document the destruction of entire families—the Diachenko, Perehudova, and Zui families were all killed completely.

Among the adult athletes who served in the Armed Forces, a consistent pattern emerges: many voluntarily joined the military despite having the option to continue their sporting careers or to remain abroad. Andrii Kutsenko returned from Italy. Maksym Halinichev turned down a spot at the European Championships. Fedir Yepifanov volunteered immediately after his 18th birthday. Their choices underscore the depth of commitment that characterized Ukraine's response to the invasion.

The IOC's decision to ban the helmet—and ultimately to disqualify Heraskevych from a race he was favored to medal in—generated substantial international criticism and paradoxically amplified the very message it sought to suppress. IOC President Coventry herself acknowledged as much, stating through tears that “no one—especially me—is disagreeing with the messaging” (ESPN, 2026b). The Angels of Sport memorial project, maintained by Team Ukraine, documents over 650 Ukrainian athletes and coaches killed since February 2022 and provides English-language profiles for many of these individuals. Heraskevych's stand ensured that the names and stories of 22 fallen Ukrainians reached a global audience that might otherwise never have known them.

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