

The vicious US media campaign against Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva

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The American media and propaganda establishment has been mobilized for a filthy, degrading campaign against 15-year-old Russian figure skating prodigy Kamila Valieva, whose performances at the ongoing Beijing Olympics attracted worldwide admiration.

Over the past week, Valieva abruptly found herself in proceedings before international sports authorities following a late-processed drug test, administered in December, which turned up trace amounts of a heart medication that is banned for its potential to bolster athletic endurance.

Exploiting the young athlete's predicament for geostrategic political and propaganda purposes, the US media campaign to smear Valieva as a "Russian cheat" was rapidly incorporated into the otherwise round-the-clock pro-war "news" to which the American population is currently being subjected.

Valieva, it must be said first and foremost in her defense, is a truly extraordinary athlete. Despite her youth and notwithstanding the allegations against her, she is indisputably one of the greatest figure skaters ever to have competed in the Olympics. In recent months, she spontaneously attracted a global following of hundreds of millions on social media with mesmerizing, record-breaking performances.

Readers who have not already watched them can judge these performances for themselves. In her short program—which is set to the sad, evocative "In memoriam," by Kirill Richter—Valieva appears to defy the laws of physics, floating impossibly like a wisp of cloth, turning suddenly like a leaf caught in the wind, while underneath this melancholy ballet her feet, attached to metal blades, fly and turn at breakneck speeds across the ice. In her free program, set to Maurice Ravel's *Boléro*, she is grand, powerful, electric, capable of bringing crowds to their feet and leaving commentators at a loss for words. The choreographer, dancer and former skater Daniil Gleikhengauz, also deserves recognition.

Valieva, born in the city of Kazan in the Republic of Tatarstan, part of Russia, made her international athletic debut in August 2019. Her accomplishments in the brief space of two and a half years are too numerous to list in one article. She is the 2022 European figure skating champion and the 2022 Russian national champion. She holds the current world records for the women's short program, free skating and total scores,

and she has set a total of nine world records during her meteoric career. She is one of the handful of female athletes ever to land the quadruple toe loop in a competition.

In China, according to the *Global Times*, hashtags associated with Valieva accumulated a staggering total of 600 million views on the social media app Weibo. On YouTube, where the performances have cumulated tens of millions of views, one can read tens of thousands of appreciative comments in every major language. At this point, her performances have been watched by a significant fraction of the global population.

The worldwide mass appeal of a Russian athlete must have constituted a thorn in the side of those constantly working to condition the US population to accept the possibility of a full-scale war with Russia—in which millions of Valieva-aged youth in both America and Russia would perish. In this context, Valieva's positive drug test, a tragedy in any case for the young prodigy in the midst of what began as a triumphant Olympic debut, was a stroke of luck for the relentless war propagandists that constitute the American media.

At this point, the allegations that Valieva was the subject of intentional doping are unproven—a point lost on the American media—and one can only speculate as to their truth.

On the one hand, it is certainly the case that Olympic athletes are subjected to extreme pressure. The opportunity to compete in the Olympics only comes once every four years, and an athlete can only maintain the demanding physical and mental regime required to stay competitive for so long. The stakes are high, and athletes in every country doubtless function right up to the edge of the line in terms of boosters, supplements and anything else that might give them an edge. Money, advertising promotions and nationalism, as in every other sphere, have a corrupting influence. It is not impossible to imagine that Valieva, or someone responsible for her care, caved in to these pressures.

On the other hand, under the circumstances, it seems highly unlikely that Valieva would have been the subject of an intentional violation of the anti-doping rules. Athletes at her level are tested routinely, so the likelihood of being caught is high. Meanwhile, the benefit of the banned substance in question—trimetazidine—would by all accounts have been marginal at best.

At this year's Olympics, in light of previous scandals, the Russian athletes are permitted to compete only as the "Russian Olympic Committee," not as representatives of Russia itself. Under these circumstances, Valieva's handlers would have been well aware that any violation of the doping rules would play into the hands of those fighting for the exclusion of Russian athletes altogether (as evidenced by the ongoing campaign surrounding Valieva). Moreover, Valieva is not a second-rate athlete who needed to risk everything to make the cut.

Then there is the matter of her young age. Under the applicable sporting rules, in light of the fact that she is under 16, she is classified as a "protected person" who cannot be held legally or morally responsible for her actions in the same manner as an adult. The rules therefore contemplate (but apparently do not strictly require) her name remaining confidential in the context of any proceedings, as well as leniency in her case that would not be shown to an adult.

Valieva submitted to the fateful routine drug test December 25. While results are usually reported within 20 days, there was an unusually long delay before the results were reported in her case, which was attributed to coronavirus-related backlogs at the lab in Stockholm, Sweden. As a result of this long delay, the positive test result dropped explosively in the midst of the Olympic games that were already underway—one day after Valieva had already competed in a team event.

As a result of the test, the Russian Anti-Doping Agency promptly suspended Valieva, but on appeal shortly thereafter, the suspension was lifted. On appeal from that decision, the international Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) upheld the lifting of the suspension on February 13, clearing the way for Valieva to compete.

During the CAS hearing, Valieva testified that she had not taken the banned medication intentionally. She claimed that her grandfather had a valid prescription for it and that she could have come into contact with it by mistake. The CAS decided that Valieva should be permitted to compete, but that in the event she won a medal, the award ceremony would be delayed until there is a final determination as to whether her conduct will be deemed a violation of the rules.

If it were not for the war propaganda requirements of American imperialism, one suspects that Valieva's case would have gone quietly through the appropriate procedures under the international sporting authorities, with her name and the positive test remaining confidential until a final determination was reached. In either case, in any sane world, the outcome would have then been an asterisk on the record of this year's Olympics. To the extent any rule violations were discovered, appropriate remedies would be imposed out of fairness to all the athletes who competed.

There is something utterly obscene in the way the US media has been mobilized in an effort to incite the population against a talented 15-year-old, attempting to recruit American athletes

and other personalities to denounce her. Are there no bigger criminals in the world?

The typical American news article features a close-up photograph of Valieva's face, usually selected from an emotional or tearful moment following a performance, juxtaposed next to the word "doping." This exploitative "clickbait" style, which one associates with gutter tabloids and mobile game ads, is now the stock-in-trade of America's "respectable" media outlets.

This is the same media that, lest it be forgotten, responded brutally to the mental health concerns of 24-year-old American athlete Simone Biles, who withdrew from the Tokyo Olympics after she was observed shaking before a team gymnastics final.

The US in particular has no business lecturing anyone about "doping," having been at the center of what the United States Anti-Doping Agency itself called "the most sophisticated, professionalized and successful [i.e., lucrative] doping program that sport has ever seen." In other words, America holds the current "gold medal" for doping. The ringleader of that doping program, exposed in 2012, was American athlete Lance Armstrong.

In addition, the hysteria being whipped up around Valieva also serves as a distraction from the runaway COVID-19 death toll in America. In the same week the US media organized itself to gang up on Valieva, nearly 16,000 more Americans died from the coronavirus, a fact that was buried if reported at all.

On Tuesday, Valieva performed in competition for the first time in the Olympics since the positive test was disclosed. As she began her short program, she faltered at her first triple-axel, which she had performed effortlessly in numerous other competitions (a fact reported with undisguised relish by the US media). Nevertheless, she went on to finish with the highest score.

However, in yesterday's free skate, Valieva fell repeatedly during a program that she had executed flawlessly in December and January. Valieva skated off the ice visibly distraught and inconsolable, covering her face as photographers attempted to take close-up photos. She finished fourth, not receiving a medal.



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