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THE HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF ATHLETICS IN UZBEKISTAN AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN MASS SPORTS

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Abstract. This article examines the historical development of athletics in Uzbekistan and analyzes its significance in the formation and development of mass sports. Athletics, which includes running, jumping, throwing, and combined events, has historically played an important role in the physical education system and in the preparation of athletes for national and international competitions. The article considers the development of athletics in Uzbekistan from its early stages in the twentieth century to the establishment of an independent national federation and its participation in major international competitions. Particular attention is paid to the achievements of Uzbek athletes at the Asian Games and Olympic Games, as well as to the role of athletics in promoting a healthy lifestyle, increasing physical activity among young people, and identifying talented athletes. The article also examines contemporary measures aimed at developing mass sports, sports infrastructure, youth competitions, and the system of athlete selection. The study demonstrates that athletics has both sporting and social significance and remains one of the fundamental means of promoting physical culture and a healthy lifestyle among the population.

Keywords: athletics, Uzbekistan, mass sports, physical education, sports development, Olympic Games, Asian Games, youth sports, healthy lifestyle, athletics federation, running, jumping, throwing.

Introduction. Athletics is one of the oldest and most universal sports in the world. Running, jumping, and throwing form the foundation of many physical activities and are closely connected with the development of strength, endurance, speed, agility, and coordination. Because many athletics exercises require relatively simple equipment and can be organized in schools, sports grounds, stadiums, parks, and open spaces, athletics has particular importance for the development of mass physical culture.

In Uzbekistan, athletics has developed as an important component of the national sports system. Its history is associated with the development of physical education, school and university sports, national competitions, and participation in international sporting events. The Uzbekistan Athletics Federation identifies historical materials covering the development of athletics in the country from 1910–1955 and 1955–1987, demonstrating that the sport has a long institutional and competitive history in Uzbekistan.

Following the establishment of independent Uzbekistan, the development of athletics entered a new stage. The Uzbekistan Athletics Federation was founded in 1993 and joined the International Association of Athletics Federations (now World Athletics) in the same year. Since then, Uzbek athletes have participated in Asian and international competitions under the national flag.

The purpose of this article is to examine the main stages in the historical development of athletics in Uzbekistan and to determine its role in the development of mass sports, particularly among children and young people.

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Historical formation of athletics in Uzbekistan. The formation of athletics in Uzbekistan is closely related to the broader development of physical culture and organized sport during the twentieth century. Athletics gradually became an important part of educational institutions, sports organizations, and competitive programs. Running, jumping, and throwing disciplines were introduced and developed through physical education programs and organized competitions.

The historical materials published by the Uzbekistan Athletics Federation divide the development of athletics in Uzbekistan into several periods and specifically document the years 1910–1955 and 1955–1987. These materials also record the achievements of Uzbek athletes and the development of individual athletics disciplines.

The pre-independence period produced a number of prominent athletes connected with Uzbekistan. For example, the Uzbekistan Athletics Federation identifies Valentina Ballod as an important figure in the history of Uzbek athletics. She became Uzbekistan's first Honored Master of Sport in athletics in the high jump, won the 1956 Spartakiad of the Peoples of the USSR, and participated in the 1956 Melbourne and 1960 Rome Olympic Games.

Another important athlete was Oleg Ryakhovsky, who achieved significant results in the triple jump, including a European silver medal in 1958, a Universiade title in 1959, two USSR championships, and a period as world record holder.

The achievements of these athletes contributed to the development of athletics traditions and demonstrated the potential of Uzbek athletes at the international level.

Development of athletics after independence. The independence of Uzbekistan in 1991 created new institutional conditions for the development of national sport. A significant milestone was the establishment of the Uzbekistan Athletics Federation in 1993 and its membership in the international athletics organization in the same year. The national team subsequently began participating independently in Asian and international competitions.

The first official international competition for the Uzbek athletics team took place in Manila in November 1993. According to the Uzbekistan Athletics Federation, the team won seven medals: one gold, five silver, and one bronze. Oleg Veretelnikov won gold in the decathlon, while other Uzbek athletes won medals in javelin throw, discus throw, shot put, and other events.

A year later, Uzbekistan participated in the Asian Games in Hiroshima for the first time. Uzbek athletes won three gold medals in athletics: Ramil Ganiev in the decathlon, Oksana Yarygina in the javelin throw, and Svetlana Ruban in the high jump. Uzbek athletes also won silver and bronze medals in several disciplines.

These achievements demonstrated that the newly independent country possessed an established athletics tradition and the capacity to compete successfully at the continental level. The development of athletics in Uzbekistan is closely associated with the country's participation in the Olympic movement. In 1996, twelve Uzbek athletics athletes participated in the Atlanta Olympic Games as members of the national Olympic team. The best result among them was achieved by Ramil Ganiev in the decathlon, where he scored 8,318 points and finished eighth.

Participation in the Olympic Games has contributed to the international recognition of Uzbek athletics and has provided young athletes with important examples of sporting achievement. Olympic participation also strengthens the relationship between grassroots physical education and elite sport: children who begin with basic running, jumping, or throwing exercises may subsequently enter specialized training and competitive programs.

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The National Olympic Committee of Uzbekistan notes that the country has developed a broader system for promoting the Olympic movement and identifying talented young athletes. A three-stage system of comprehensive competitions known as the "Presidential Olympics" has been introduced, with the aim of strengthening talent identification and developing the Olympic movement from the grassroots level.

Athletics as a foundation of mass sports. One of the most important characteristics of athletics is its accessibility. Unlike sports that require specialized equipment or complex facilities, many athletics activities can be practiced with relatively limited resources. Running, walking, basic jumping exercises, and general physical conditioning can be organized in schools, sports grounds, parks, stadiums, and other community spaces.

For this reason, athletics has considerable potential for mass participation. Regular participation in running and other athletics exercises can contribute to the development of cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, coordination, speed, flexibility, and general physical fitness.

The importance of mass sports has increased within Uzbekistan's contemporary sports policy. Government information emphasizes that sports infrastructure includes stadiums, training halls, workout grounds, running tracks, sports schools, and sports complexes. Physical education in mahallas, regional competitions, and the Five Initiatives Olympiad are among the mechanisms used to expand participation in sports.

The Ministry responsible for sports development has also identified the organization of large-scale activities in cities, villages, and neighborhoods as an important task for popularizing sport, particularly among children and young people and encouraging regular physical activity. Thus, athletics can serve as a practical bridge between everyday physical activity and organized competitive sport.

Children and young people represent one of the most important groups for the development of athletics. Athletics exercises can be adapted to different ages and levels of physical preparedness. Schoolchildren can begin with basic running, jumping, and throwing activities before progressing toward specialized disciplines.

The systematic involvement of young people in athletics can have several educational effects. First, it encourages discipline and regular physical activity. Second, it develops qualities such as perseverance, self-control, responsibility, and goal orientation. Third, competitions provide opportunities for young people to develop confidence and learn to work according to established rules.

The development of youth sports also contributes to the identification of future high-performance athletes. The current sports system in Uzbekistan combines mass participation with mechanisms for identifying promising athletes and directing them toward specialized training. Government sources report that the "Presidential Olympics" and Olympic centers are being used as part of this broader system of talent development.

For athletics, this approach is particularly relevant because young athletes may demonstrate potential at an early stage in sprinting, middle- and long-distance running, jumping, throwing, or combined events.

In recent years, Uzbekistan has continued to strengthen its sports infrastructure and competitive system. The Uzbekistan Athletics Federation continues to organize national championships and tournaments for different age categories. Recent federation information includes national competitions

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for U14 athletes, open championships, and competitions connected with national youth and Olympic development programs.

The modernization of sports infrastructure is another important factor. The Olympic Village in Tashkent has been developed as a major scientific, practical, and training center for national sports. The government has indicated that Olympic centers and related facilities are intended to support the preparation of national teams and the development of sports reserves.

At the same time, attention is being given to the digitalization of the sports sector and to strengthening the activities of sports federations. These measures can improve athlete monitoring, competition management, training organization, and the identification of promising young athletes.

The broader development of mass sports is also reflected in national participation figures. Government information states that more than 15 million citizens are currently engaged in mass sports and that the number of people regularly participating in physical activity has increased significantly in recent years.

Although these figures refer to mass sports generally rather than athletics specifically, they demonstrate the expanding environment in which athletics can contribute to public physical activity.

Social significance of athletics. The significance of athletics extends beyond competition and medals. As a form of physical activity, it can contribute to the formation of a healthy lifestyle and the development of an active society.

From a social perspective, athletics can be used to:

- increase regular physical activity among children and adults;
- promote healthy lifestyle habits;
- strengthen physical fitness;
- provide accessible opportunities for recreational exercise;
- identify talented young athletes;
- develop discipline and perseverance;
- encourage participation in school and community competitions;
- create a pathway from recreational sport to professional sport.

The community-based nature of many athletics activities makes the sport particularly suitable for mass participation. Running events, school athletics competitions, local championships, and recreational athletics programs can be organized at relatively different levels of complexity.

The development of athletics therefore supports two interconnected objectives: increasing the general level of physical activity among the population and creating a reserve of talented athletes for national and international competitions.

Despite the progress achieved, the further development of athletics requires continuous attention to several areas. These include improving the accessibility and quality of sports facilities, increasing the number of qualified coaches, strengthening youth competitions, improving scientific and methodological support, and ensuring that talented athletes receive systematic training.

Another important task is maintaining the connection between mass and elite sports. The development of high-performance athletes should not be separated from the expansion of grassroots participation. A broad base of children and young people involved in athletics creates greater opportunities for identifying talented athletes.

The continued modernization of sports infrastructure and the development of youth competitions provide opportunities for strengthening this connection. The Uzbekistan Athletics Federation's

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ongoing national competitions and the country's broader system of youth sports provide an institutional foundation for further development.

The future development of athletics can also benefit from modern technologies, including digital athlete monitoring, video analysis, electronic timing, performance databases, and scientifically based training programs. Such technologies can improve both coaching quality and the process of identifying promising athletes.

Conclusion. The history of athletics in Uzbekistan demonstrates the gradual transformation of the sport from an important component of physical education into a nationally organized and internationally competitive sporting discipline. The development of athletics during the twentieth century created a foundation of sporting traditions and produced athletes who represented Uzbekistan and the wider Soviet sporting system at major competitions. After independence, the establishment of the Uzbekistan Athletics Federation in 1993 and the country's participation in Asian and international competitions marked a new stage in the development of national athletics.

The achievements of Uzbek athletes at the Asian Games and Olympic Games demonstrate the competitive potential of the country. At the same time, the significance of athletics should not be measured only through medals and records. Its broader value lies in its accessibility and its ability to involve large numbers of people in regular physical activity.

For Uzbekistan, athletics can serve as an important foundation for mass sports because running, jumping, and throwing activities can be adapted to different ages, levels of physical preparation, and social environments. The development of sports infrastructure, youth competitions, the “Presidential Olympics,” Olympic centers, and community-based physical activity programs creates opportunities to strengthen the connection between mass participation and high-performance sport.

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