

Olympic Boxing Is Having a Fight About Gender

What to know about the controversy over two boxers who were disqualified from competing as women in the World Championships but are taking part in the Olympics.

By Chad de Guzman

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Neither Algeria's [Imane Khelif](#) nor Taiwan's [Lin Yu-ting](#) are making their Olympic debuts. Both boxers already competed in the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo, where they were eliminated in the quarterfinals and round of 16 of their respective weight classes.

But that hasn't stopped their appearances in Paris from causing a stir.

Khelif, age 25, fights in the women's 66-kg quarterfinals on Saturday after her preliminary opponent on Thursday [abandoned the bout](#) less than a minute in, and Lin, 28, is set to enter the ring on Friday for the women's 57-kg round of 16—but critics claim that they're both actually "[men](#)."

The controversy of their gender has swept over the sport since last year, when the two were both disqualified from the World Championships in New Delhi after they were on track to win medals but failed an eligibility test.

The International Boxing Association (IBA), the organizer of the World Championships, [said at the time](#) that athletes who “pretended to be women” were excluded based on tests that showed “they have XY chromosomes.” (Women typically have XX chromosome pairs, and men typically have XY pairs. Neither Khelif nor Lin have ever identified as men, as transgender, or as intersex—which refers to people with both male and female sex characteristics.)

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However, the Russian-led IBA, which has long faced [questions about integrity](#) and [concerns about governance](#), does not oversee Olympic qualification. For the 2024 Summer Games, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), does, and it has repeatedly affirmed Khelif’s and Lin’s eligibility.

“All athletes participating in the boxing tournament of the Olympic Games Paris 2024 comply with the competition’s eligibility and entry regulations, as well as all applicable medical regulations,” the IOC said in a statement on Monday.

“Everyone competing in the women’s category is participating, following, complying with the competition eligibility rules,” IOC spokesperson Mark Adams said during [a press conference](#) on Tuesday. “These athletes have competed many times before for many years—they haven’t just suddenly arrived.” (Adams, in [another press conference](#) on Thursday, also pushed back against the idea that [testosterone](#) testing would be a “panacea” to such issues.)



Algeria’s Imane Khelif in Tokyo on July 30, 2021. Buda Mendes—Pool/AFP/Getty Images

The IBA criticized the IOC in a [statement](#) on Wednesday for the “inconsistent application of eligibility criteria,” and it reiterated that Khelif and Lin were found to “have competitive advantages over other female competitors” based on the results of tests they took. “The IOC’s differing regulations on these matters, in which IBA is not involved, raise serious questions about both competitive fairness and athletes’ safety,” the organization said.

As Khelif was slated to face Italy's Angela Carini in the preliminaries on Thursday, officials in the Italian government also complained, according to Italian news agency [ANSA](#). "It is surprising that there are no certain, strict, uniform criteria at the international level, and that there can be a suspicion, and far more than a suspicion, of an unfair and potentially dangerous contest for one of the contenders at the Olympics, an event that symbolizes sporting fairness," said Family and Equal Opportunities Minister Eugenia Roccella. Sports Minister Andrea Abodi added: "I find it difficult to understand that there is no alignment in the parameters of minimum hormonal values at an international level, which includes the European and world championships and the Olympics."

The controversy has also been discussed widely by social media users, current and former athletes, and commentators, many of whom have expressed concern based on the fact that biological males [pack a more powerful punch](#). "I don't agree with them being allowed to compete in sport, especially combat sports. It can be incredibly dangerous," Australian boxing captain Caitlin Parker [reportedly said](#). "It's shocking that they were actually allowed to get this far, what is going on?" Irish former boxer Barry McGuigan [posted on X](#). "Someone could get killed," [opined](#) Oliver Brown, chief sports writer for U.K. newspaper the *Daily Telegraph*.

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Khelif's and Lin's home countries—[and compatriots](#)—have stood by them. [Algeria's Olympic Committee](#) slammed the “malicious and unethical” attacks on Khelif this week, saying that it has taken “all necessary measures to protect her. “These attempts at defamation, based on lies, are totally unfair, especially at a crucial time when she is preparing for the Olympic Games, the peak of her career,” the statement said.



Lin Yu-ting of Chinese Taipei (Taiwan) in Tokyo on July 26, 2021. Ou Dongqu—Xinhua News Agency/Getty Images

And Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te's spokesperson said Thursday in [a post on X](#) that Lin “has shown incredible strength, overcoming doubts to compete fairly on the world stage. Your determination inspires the nation!”

Lin, who has been hailed back home for breaking gender stereotypes, told [local media](#) last week that she's not trying to draw attention to herself by keeping her hair short. "Actually, what I have been doing is being myself," she said. "If I wore my hair long, I would have to spend too much time tending to it and have no time to rest between morning and afternoon training sessions. How could I perform well that way?"

Her coach also said that Lin has been frustrated with the insults and criticisms she reads on social media, but Lin emphasized, "I want to focus on my performance in the ring. ... All I can do is prepare and try my best to ignore what the haters say."

For her part, Khelif, who became a [UNICEF ambassador](#) earlier this year, has said she is most proud of her ability to overcome obstacles, including finding success in a sport that her father didn't approve of girls participating in. "My dream is to win a gold medal," she said in March. "I particularly want to inspire girls."