

The Purpose of North Korean Gymnastics

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North Korean gymnastics is divided into collective gymnastics and daily gymnastics by Articles 15 (Collective gymnastics) and 17 (Public sports (daily sports)) of the North Korean Sports Act.

The collective gymnastics in Article 15 of the North Korean Sports Act is characterized as an athletic activity that emphasizes the spirit of collectivism in the socialist system. The major works of collective gymnastics that combine athletic skills and artistry include grand mass games such “Arirang” (2002), “The Glorious Country” (2018), “People’s Country” (2019), and “Great Leadership” (2020). Article 17 Public Sports (Daily sports) defines gymnastics as a daily work-out for improving health and preventing injuries, which include daily gymnastics for each age group from young children to the elderly (i.e., dance gymnastics routines for kindergarten children, youths, the general public, the elderly, etc.), “breaktime gymnastics for workers,” “soccer dance gymnastics,” “basketball dance gymnastics,” and “wrestling dance gymnastics.”

North Korea's emphasis on gymnastics began during the Kim Il-sung era. On November 4, 1969, Kim Il-sung delivered the following speech at the National Sports Festival.

An important purpose of the continuous promotion of collective gymnastics is to cultivate a collectivist spirit among young students.···Because collective gymnastics is a form of sport combined with high artistry and ideology, if young students are trained politically and ideologically in the process of group gymnastics, their artistic discipline will increase, leading to better singing and dancing.··· Breaktime gymnastics must be performed by those who work in coal mines or underground tunnels, as well as those who work in underground factories. (*Rodong Sinmun*, November 4, 1969)

North Korea's gymnastics system was established during the Kim Il-sung era and developed into organizational physical activity. On the other hand, gymnastics during the Kim Jong-il era was

transformed into a form of propaganda collective gymnastics that includes ideology, artistry, and athletic skills, which was used as a means of publicizing the communist, the Juche ideology, and the legitimacy of the party's lines and policies both internally and externally.

Developing group gymnastics has important significance in nurturing young students into fully developed communist human beings... Collective gymnastics is an important means of demonstrating the legitimacy and vitality of our Party's lines and policies by firmly arming the workers with the Juche ideology.

***Kim il Sung: Selected Works 9* (Pyongyang: Workers' Party of Korea Publishing House, 1997))**





Since the Kim Jong-il era, group gymnastics has changed into a mass gymnastics and artistic performance that consists of gymnastics, card sections, and music. In 2002, 'Arirang', a mass game, was performed for the first time to commemorate the 90th anniversary of Kim Il-sung's birth, the 60th birthday of Kim Jong-il, and the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Korean People's Army. The Grand Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance 'Arirang' was performed every year from 2002 to 2013, except in 2006. 'Arirang' highlights the goals of uniting the people and building a strong and prosperous nation through comradeship, the Arirang nation, single-minded unity, modernization, and informatization. The mass game also highlights the Mt. Paektu Army and military-first policy for its military, while emphasizing messages regarding the railroad connection from Sinuiju to Busan, cooperation in the three main areas for reunification to South Korea, and independence, peace, and friendship to the outside world.







The mass games are grand, involving around 100,000 artists, adolescents, students, and workers. However, the infringement of the human rights of the children forced to participate is a persisting problem.

During the Kim Jong-un era, from September 2013 to 2017, the mass games were not held. The performance "The Glorious Country" was held in September 2018 as the first mass games in five years, held to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the North Korean government.

Similar to the Arirang Mass Games, approximately 100,000 artists, adolescents, students, and workers performed in "The Glorious Country." However, unlike the Arirang Mass Games, "The Glorious Country" mass games was used to promote Kim Jong-un's achievements, as he moved into the global stage through the inter-Korean and China-DPRK summits in 2018 and the U.S.-DPRK summit, and North Korea's new leap forward, both domestically and internationally. The key characteristics of "The Glorious Country" are that it promoted single-hearted unity and strengthened socialism internally within the Kim regime, the protection of the border to create an impregnable fortress within the military, an era of peace and prosperity on a unified Korean Peninsula toward South Korea, and changes in North Korea through its efforts to diversify foreign relations toward the international community.

<The major characteristics of the mass games “The Glorious Country”>

Date	September 10, 2018		
Location	Rungrado 1 st of May Stadium		
Performance duration	About 1.5 hours		
Number of participants	Approximately 100,000 (artists, students, workers)		
Chapters	Prologue – Rising Paektu Mountain, Chapter 1 – Socialism is our home, Chapter 2 – The road to victory, Chapter 3 – A new history Chapter 4 – Unifying 3000 ri, Chapter 5 – Chapter of international goodwill, Concluding chapter – We have our great party		
Major characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-The first mass games to be performed in 5 years after the Arirang Mass Games in 2013-Whereas the Arirang Mass Games focused on the Japanese colonial period, overcoming hardship, and the achievements of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, “The Glorious Country” emphasized the takeoff of the Kim Jong-un era-Modern performance utilizing media art and flashy lights-In response to the issue of the infringement of human rights, children performed simpler motions and were exempt from advanced performances-Held at the rebuilt Rungrado 1st of May Stadium with modern facilities (holds 150,000 people and is largest stadium in the world)		
	Propaganda slogan in the background		
To North Koreans			
	Single-hearted unity	Kimilsungism of society	
			
	Victory if we protect socialism	People-centered, people-respecting, people-loving	

To the military		
	The achievements of the immortal military-first policy	Protecting the border to become an impregnable fortress
To South Korea		
	The new era of peace and prosperity on a unified Korean Peninsula	Our ethnic group
To foreign countries		
	Self-reliance	Diversification of foreign relations

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1F42BzUHsnQ>

North Korea's takeoff has been stalled ever since the U.S.-North Korea Hanoi Summit fell through in February 2019. North Korea still faces sanctions posed by the international community and the U.S.. In this situation, North Korea performed "People's Country" on June 3, 2019, "Invincible Socialism" on June 21, 2019 on account of President Xi Jinping's state visit to North Korea, and "Great Leadership" on October 11, 2020 to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the

North Korean regime. These performances aimed to emphasize people-first politics rather than military-first politics to promote citizen integration and the leadership of the Supreme Leader to the North Korean public, the military of the party rather than the military first policy to the military, our ethnic group to South Korea, and “Let’s live our way” amidst international sanctions to the international community.

The mass games of Kim Jong-un’s reign continue amid strengthening international sanctions in 2018 and the global COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. In 2018, the performances aimed to show off “Kim Jong-un’s achievements” after he came into power and “goals for taking a leap forward;” the performances in 2019 showed “maintenance of the socialist regime” and “self-reliance.” In 2020, the performances were held to strengthen national rule and win public sentiment by showing “self-reliance” and “Let’s live our way” during the three hardships of international sanctions, flood damage, and COVID-19.

It seems North Korea’s mass games will continue to be held to inform the direction and legitimacy of the Party domestically and internationally and to strengthen the people’s collectivist spirit.■

The 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and North Korea

○ The International Olympic Committee (IOC) suspends North Korea on September, 2021

- The IOC announced North Korea was suspended from participating in the Olympics and illegible to receive financial support until the end of 2022 for not attending the 2020 Tokyo Olympics on the grounds of Chapter 4, Rule 27, Clause 3 (Obligated to participate) of the Olympic Charter
- North Korea’s National Olympic Committee (NOC) must explain why it did not participate due to COVID-19 on the basis of Chapter 4, Rule 27, Clause 9 (The IOC must give NOC opportunities to explain) of the Olympic Charter
- It is unsure if North Korea will be participating in the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics scheduled for February 2022

○ North Korea is presumed to respond to the IOC’s suspension in the following ways:

- North Korea normally receives very few medals during the Winter Olympics, and did not participate in the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics
- Although it should participate in the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics due to its relations with China, North Korean competitors currently have no experience competing overseas due to COVID-19
- The IOC’s suspension may have given North Korea a useful way out

Firstly, North Korea could belatedly explain its current COVID-19 situation, ask the IOC to overturn its suspension, and announce that it will be hard to participate in the Beijing Olympics due to the IOC’s ban

Secondly, North Korea could participate by creating a combined team with South Korea as it did during the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics to improve inter-Korean relations and as a means to communicate with the international community

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