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News

Canadians overwhelmingly support Olympic truce

By **Tu Thanh Ha**, The Globe and Mail Posted Thursday, February 11, 2010 2:05 AM ET

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More than 80 per cent of Canadians support the idea that countries participating in the Olympics should suspend hostilities during the Games and declare a temporary peace, a recent polls shows.

But only one in two polled by Nanos Research agreed with barring athletes from countries that don't observe a truce.

a recent survey shows that respondents are divided when asked whether countries that won't lay down their arms should be barred outright from the sporting event.

More than 80 per cent of people polled by Nanos Research said they agreed that countries at the Games should declare a temporary peace.

However, only one in two fully agreed with the notion of barring athletes from countries that don't observe a truce.

Such ambivalence is a reminder that ideals and practicality have always clashed when dealing with the notion of an Olympic truce.

The idea of an Olympic truce, called ekecheiria, emerged during the ancient Greek Olympics, to allow participants to travel safely to the event.

But in reality, even back then, the truce wasn't widely respected, said Jennifer Beller, a professor of sports ethics at Washington State University.

"There is some pretty strong academic support that maybe [the truce] didn't exist to the extent that we think," she said.

The modern Games have recast those ideals, but haven't been immune to external strife. Because most of the world is not composed of Olympic athletes, the Games are a focal point for the political aims and concerns of the audience, not of the athletes, Prof. Beller said.

"Ultimately, for whom are the Games played? They are played for the athletes," she said. "If a country is at war, it is not a reflection on the athletes."

As it has done during previous Games since 1992, the International Olympic Committee has called for a halt to war during the Vancouver Games that begin tomorrow. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also joined in, appealing for "a temporary respite from violence and armed conflict."

But IOC President Jacques Rogge, speaking at the unveiling of the Olympic Truce Wall, a monument in the athletes village in Vancouver, also struck a realistic tone.

"Unfortunately, sport cannot maintain peace and sport cannot change the world," Mr. Rogge said. "But it can make its citizens better."

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