[**A future PM?**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1637517/a-future-pm)

[F.S. Aijazuddin](https://www.dawn.com/authors/1314/f-s-aijazuddin)Published July 29, 2021 - Updated 2 days ago

The writer is an author.

WHY do we subject ourselves every four years to international humiliation, expose our disregard for competitive sports, and reveal an unconscionable neglect of our sportspersons?

Sending [10 Pakistanis](https://www.dawn.com/news/1635484) out of a population of 138 million adults to compete in the 2020 Olympic Games at Tokyo was not a joke: it was a farce. The 10 comprised seven men and three women, competing in athletics, badminton, judo, shooting, swimming, and weightlifting. They were accompanied by as many officials — a commendable improvement on the Rio Games in 2016, when seven lean sportspersons carried the burden of 17 un-weighed officials.

The 2020 Summer Olympics began with Nipponese punctuality, only a year late. Emperor Naruhito presided over the [opening ceremony](https://www.dawn.com/news/1636480). He was four years old when his grandfather Emperor Hirohito opened the 1964 Olympics in the same city. Those Olympics were conducted on a chopstick budget compared to the cost of subsequent Summer games: Beijing 2008 cost $6.8 billion plus $3bn for a new airport; London 2012, $15bn; Rio de Janeiro 2016, $13.7bn, and Tokyo 2020, $20bn. Host governments are inveigled by the IOC into believing that such outlays are justified because of the intangible spin-offs — job creation, tourism, the construction of a lasting infrastructure, etc. Covid-19 has put paid to that.

Most Japanese thought hosting the Olym­pics yet again was unjustified. Despite their reservations, the City of Tokyo and the Oly­m­­­­­pic Committee decided that, Covid-19 notwithstanding, the games had to be held. Winners will take home gold, silver and bronze medals. The losers were 35m citizens of Tokyo who will pay for this extravagance until Naruhito’s successor is on the imperial throne.

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The opening ceremony had a cinematic quality to it. Participants had to act as if there was a live audience occupying the 80,000 seats in the new National Stadium. Each of the 206 national teams that formed the Parade of Nations waved to empty seats, darkened for discretion. The Japanese sensibly decided not to compete with the memory of Beijing’s spectacle, preferring to present Japan’s culture in sushi-size helpings — a single Kabuki actor, one energetic concert pianist — until the dramatic finale when a representation of Mount Fuji (as symbolic of timeless Japan as the pyramids are of ancient Egypt) opened like a volcano for the Olympic flame to erupt.

Had the Parade of Nations been a procession of animals instead of Olympic hopefuls, it would have paralleled the queue of God’s creatures that entered Noah’s Ark. Every genus of humanoids that God has created walked in as mankind.

After the games are over, these sportspersons will return home to compatriots who will applaud their endeavours, gloss over their failures and celebrate their successes. They are luckier than the Pakistani contingent. While IOC representatives stood up one by one to acknowledge their national teams, the Pakistani representative was invisible in the darkened VIP area.

**Read:** [*More officials than athletes in Pakistan’s Olympics contingent*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1274671)

Worse was to come. Viewers watching the weightlifting contest in the 67 kg category were taken behind the scenes to show the contestants preparing for the ordeal. Each had a coach who coddled his charge and a masseuse who stimulated flagging concentration with smelling salts. All that is except our weightlifter Talha Talib. He sat alone, like some refugee from Gujranwala, swa­thed in a nondescript blanket. He emerged from under it to make his first attempt.

Compared to other muscular competitors, Talha looked undernourished, undertrained, and under stress. During the snatch stage, he failed and then colla­p­sed, requiring me­­dical attention. The Japanese with tactful consideration held up a por­table screen to hide his predicament. On his third attempt, Talha ma­­naged to ach­ie­­ve a lift of 150 kg (more than twice his bodyweight). No one expected Talha to do any better, except Talha. In the following section — the clean and jerk — Talha showed why his talent was not man-trained but God-given. He lifted 170 kg, and then dropped gratefully into a sajdah. The bronze medal [might have been his](https://www.dawn.com/news/1636860/still-proud-of-you-weightlifter-talha-talib-misses-out-on-olympic-gold-but-a-hero-is-born), had his total of 320 kg not been superseded by only two kilos when Italy’s Zanni pipped him with 322 kg.

The pride Pakistani viewers felt at seeing Talha’s heroic efforts were dampened when the TV cameras caught a view of his attendant’s borrowed T-shirt. Its logo read not ‘Pakistan’ but ‘Palestine’.

If Talha returns (he has every reason to turn his back on the country that turns its back on its Olympians), Talha Talib should be given a hero’s welcome at the highest level. Captain Imran Khan and his team were, when they won the Cricket World Cup in 1992. Talha is still only 21 years old. If success in sports is the main criterion for becoming Pakistan’s prime minister, selectors should begin nurturing Talha Talib from now.

*The writer is an author.*

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