

OLYMPICS

Why some American athletes can compete for other countries in the Olympics

By **Steve Marantz** Globe Correspondent, Updated July 22, 2021, 12:56 p.m.



Milorad Cavic (left) took silver in the men's 100-meter butterfly in 2008, joining Michael Phelps (center) and Australia's Andrew Lauterstein on the podium. Cavic competed for Serbia despite growing up in the United States. MARK BAKER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Julimar Avila was born and raised in Hyde Park. But she'll compete for Honduras in the Tokyo Olympics.

The swimmer from Weston, Ind., is among a subset of Olympic athletes who compete

One swimmer from Weston and BU is among a subset of Olympic athletes who compete for a non-native country. Data for the 2021 Summer Games is not yet available, but the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea featured 178 such athletes, about 6 percent of all competitors.

Their motivations vary, but typically it is because they are shut out of Olympic berths in their native country. In Avila's case — as a dual citizen of the United States and Honduras — she likely would not have qualified for the US swim team stacked with elite performers who, as history suggest, will dominate the Olympics.

A bylaw to Rule 41 of the Olympic Charter states that athletes with dual citizenship can represent the country they choose, and athletes who gain new citizenship or wish to change their Olympic status can do so if three years have passed since they competed for their previous country.

Before Avila there was Milorad Cavic, a native Californian with dual Serbian and American citizenship, who decided to swim for Yugoslavia/Serbia in 2000, '04, and '08 because superstars Michael Phelps and Ian Crocker were ahead of him in the 100 butterfly. Cavic won silver in 2008, a millisecond behind Phelps.

“Let's say you are ranked third, fourth, or even 10th in the world, but two of the swimmers ahead of you are both American,” wrote Phillip Whitten in *Swimming World* magazine. “Why gamble 10 or 15 years of hard work on a long shot? Especially, when you can swim for, say, Qatar, and be assured of an Olympic berth . . .”

Honduras is sending only two swimmers to Japan and has never won an Olympic swimming medal. Costa Rica is the only Central American country to have medaled in swimming, with four.

“It's a matter of resources,” Avila says. “Latin American countries give funding to soccer, but other sports like swimming need better representation.”

Non-native dual-citizen athletes travel a two-way street, and some compete for the US.

Nigerian-born Hakeem Olajuwon helped the 1996 basketball Dream Team win gold. Canadian-born Tanith Belbin won a silver in ice dancing in 2006, with partner Benjamin Agosto, after Congress passed a special act, signed by President George W. Bush, granting her citizenship before the Turin Winter Games.

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These athletes were NOT born here.

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Believe Me Not

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Part of the reason they can switch allegiances which isn't mentioned is so that developing nations can advance the sport in their country. May be better oif they all competed as athletes without nations but then Nike and Adidas and the like would control the games.

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Or Reebok... do you remember the infamous "Dan and Dave" sneaker promotion, where the two American decathletes were to compete in Barcelona?

And Dan (O'Brien) went on to wash out in the U.S. Olympic trials and never got to the Olympics?

Some talk-show gasbaggers were "oh, it's not fair! OH, the HUMANITY!"

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Duel citizenship.....end of story.

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DUAL. And you should all be so lucky....

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Excellent rule.

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Did any of you ever hear of David Hemery? OK...

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