

The athlete-led push to sever the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) ties with fossil fuel sponsors represents a pivotal moment in the intersection of sport, ethics, and environmental survival. Amid the Milano-Cortina Winter Olympics, 88 Olympians and Paralympians, joined by 53 aspiring elite athletes, [published an open letter via the "For Future Games" initiative](#). Ratcheting up an earlier collective demand from 450 Olympians (in March last year) that planetary care become the IOC's "absolute priority," this new appeal directly calls for excluding fossil fuel companies from sponsorships altogether.

The athletes' message to Olympic organisers is clear – fossil fuel sponsorship is incompatible with the future of sport.

That the Winter Games has this year been sponsored by one of the world's largest fossil fuel companies is too significant a contradiction to go unaddressed. pic.twitter.com/8Nk4xltlJK

— Cool Down @cooldownnetwork.bsky.social (@cooldownnetwork)

February 11, 2026

The letter, addressed to IOC President Kirsty Coventry, the Executive Board, and members, argues that "the biggest threat to the Olympic dream is fossil fuels." Signatories, including winter sports athletes who have experienced firsthand the vanishing snowpack and unreliable conditions, assert that partnering with polluters undermines the Olympic Charter's principles of sustainability, human dignity, and excellence. They highlight how fossil fuel emissions drive the climate crisis, endangering the very existence of winter sports: projections indicate that by mid-century, few reliable venues for snow-dependent events may remain viable, and by the 2080s, over half of historic Winter Olympic locations could become

untenable without drastic global reductions.

This demand builds on a pattern of growing athlete activism. Earlier efforts, such as petitions during the 2026 Games buildup, targeted specific sponsors like Italian oil giant Eni (a “Premium Partner” for Milano-Cortina). Groups like Ski Fossil Free and Greenpeace amplified calls to end “sportswashing”, where fossil fuel firms use high-profile associations to green their image while continuing extraction that accelerates warming. The open letter escalates this by proposing concrete actions: establishing formal athlete-IOC dialogue grounded in climate science and lived experience; adopting a clear sponsor eligibility policy banning fossil fuel entities (mirroring the IOC’s longstanding tobacco ban); and embedding this policy in the organization’s strategic framework.

A second athlete-led campaign, within days of the first, is urging the IOC to permanently and swiftly ban [#fossilfuel](https://t.co/GJJqdR1mOh) sponsorship.<https://t.co/GJJqdR1mOh>

— Seniors for Climate Action Now! (SCAN!) (@Seniors_CAN) **February 12, 2026**

The IOC’s sustainability rhetoric, touted in reports and commitments to reduce emissions, clashes starkly with its funding model. Corporate sponsorships provide a significant revenue stream, often from high-emission sectors. Critics argue this creates a moral hazard: celebrating human peak performance while normalizing industries that erode the planetary conditions enabling such achievements. Winter athletes, in particular, bear disproportionate impacts, shorter seasons, artificial snow reliance, venue relocations, and heightened injury risks from unstable conditions. The letter frames this not as optional virtue-signaling but as existential: without bold steps, the Olympic movement risks presiding over its own

obsolescence.

Proponents of maintaining fossil fuel ties might counter that sponsorship revenue funds athlete development, infrastructure, and global accessibility, and that abrupt exclusions could destabilize finances. Yet precedents exist: the IOC banned tobacco sponsorships decades ago on health grounds, proving ethical lines can be drawn without collapse. Fossil fuels pose a comparable, if broader, threat, backed by overwhelming scientific consensus on their role in climate disruption. Alternatives abound in renewable energy firms, sustainable tech, and green finance, which could align funding with Olympic ideals rather than contradict them.

This athlete mobilization carries broader implications. Sports command massive audiences and cultural influence; decoupling from fossil fuels could accelerate corporate accountability worldwide. Athletes, as role models and stakeholders, wield unique moral authority, especially when their livelihoods depend on stable climates. The letter's emphasis on athlete inclusion in decision-making challenges the IOC's traditionally top-down governance, pushing for democratization in line with modern expectations of transparency and equity.

The IOC now faces a choice: heed the voices of those who embody Olympic values or cling to outdated partnerships. Ignoring this call risks alienating future generations of athletes and fans who view climate action as non-negotiable. Embracing it could reposition the Olympics as a force for planetary good, ensuring the Games endure not just as a spectacle but as a symbol of resilience.

In an era of cascading crises, the athletes' plea is clear: protect the dream by protecting the planet. The IOC must act decisively, exclude fossil fuel sponsors, open genuine dialogue, and lead by example. The alternative is a legacy tarnished by complicity in the forces melting the snow beneath winter sport's feet.