

PAIRED TEXTS
two stories that share
a topic or theme

Compare & Contrast



**SHE'S AFGHANISTAN'S
GREATEST HOPE FOR THE OLYMPICS.
SO WHY DO SOME PEOPLE WANT
HER DEAD?**



TURN THE PAGE to find out why Sadaf is the Jackie Robinson of Afghanistan. →

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SADAF RAHIMI

A teen boxer **fights for women's rights** in Afghanistan—literally

Sadaf Rahimi dances around on a faded pink mat, throwing punches at her opponent. The 17-year-old boxer is light on her feet, expertly dodging hits and tossing out quick jabs. The room is small and dilapidated. Cracked mirrors hang on the walls. Four worn punching bags dangle from the ceiling. The concrete floor is hard and cold.

Watching the easy way Sadaf moves, you'd have no idea how much pressure this high school student is under: Sadaf is the only woman from Afghanistan who will be competing at the Olympics in London this summer. It's a remarkable achievement in a country where the struggle for women's rights has been long—and violent.

It Hasn't Been Easy

In the 1990s, Afghanistan was ruled by an oppressive regime called the Taliban.

The Taliban took away virtually every freedom—especially from women and girls. It was illegal for girls to get an education. Women couldn't leave their homes without a male family member to escort them. And sports? Athletics

were strictly off limits. Those who failed to comply could be punished or killed.

When the Taliban prohibited women from participating in sporting events, Afghanistan was banned from the Olympic Games. But all that started to change when U.S.-led forces toppled the Taliban in 2001. Women could finally play sports again.

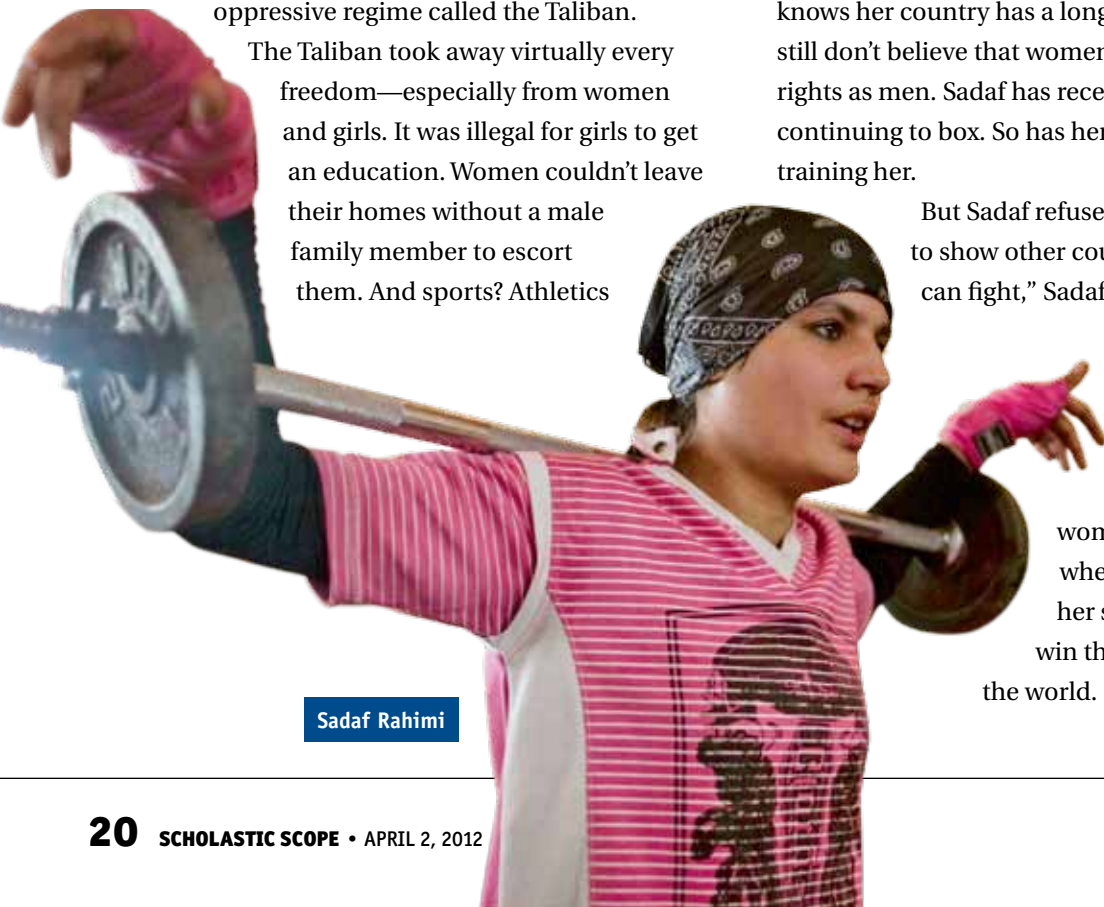
Still, it hasn't been easy. Women athletes have few resources. Sadaf and the other women she trains with don't have access to proper equipment—not even a boxing ring. They practice in a run-down room at a stadium in the capital city of Kabul. Under the Taliban, that stadium was the site of public executions—many of them of women who had dared to break the rules.

Ready to Fight

Sadaf, whose family is behind her 100 percent, knows her country has a long way to go. Some Afghans still don't believe that women should have the same rights as men. Sadaf has received death threats for continuing to box. So has her coach, Saber Sharifi, for training her.

But Sadaf refuses to back down. "I want to show other countries that an Afghan girl can fight," Sadaf says. She is proud to be a symbol of empowerment for Afghan women.

This summer will be the first time the Olympics will include women's boxing. Regardless of whether Sadaf wins the gold, her story of bravery is sure to win the hearts of fans all over the world. ●



Sadaf Rahimi

THEN

JACKIE ROBINSON

How one man broke racial barriers and **changed baseball forever**

On the playgrounds and vacant lots of Pasadena, California, no ballplayer was better than young Jackie Robinson. No kid ran faster. No kid hit more home runs. And no kid had bigger dreams.

It was the 1930s, and Jackie's mother, Mallie, was raising her five children alone. The family was poor. As African-Americans, they endured racism and discrimination daily. But Mallie taught her kids to keep their self-respect and to reach for their dreams. Jackie's dream was to play professional sports.

From an early age, Jackie showed incredible skill. In college, he was an all-star athlete. After serving in the Army, he played baseball for the Negro League. In those days, racist policies kept African-Americans from being accepted into the professional major leagues—so they formed the Negro League. Though it was popular, its players had few benefits. They had little money for equipment and training. Some were paid only \$170 a month. (In the major leagues, white players could earn as much as \$5,000.) But times were changing.

“A Ballplayer With Guts”

In 1945, Branch Rickey, general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, decided the time had come to bring African-American players into Major League Baseball. Rickey wanted a player who was supremely talented. He also wanted a player who had confidence and self-respect. Rickey met with Jackie and asked him if he could endure the abuse that would surely come his way.

“Do you want a ballplayer who's not afraid to fight back?” Robinson asked.

“I want a ballplayer with guts enough *not* to fight back!” Rickey replied.

Jackie accepted the challenge.



Jackie Robinson

Blazing a Trail

As Rickey had predicted, Jackie had a rough time at first. Base runners badgered him and tried to spike him with their cleats. Some Dodgers demanded that he be kicked off the team. Jackie received death threats. The abuse enraged him, but he maintained his cool.

Slowly, players and fans began to accept baseball's newest all-star. And Jackie had blazed a trail. Soon, other African-Americans joined the major leagues. Over the course of his 10-year career, Jackie helped the Dodgers win the National League pennant six times. He was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1962.

Today, Jackie Robinson is remembered most for his integrity and courage. It seems Mallie Robinson taught her son well. ●

QUICK WRITE

Why does the writer call Sadaf the “Jackie Robinson of Afghanistan”? Use details from BOTH articles to support your ideas.

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