

Zhukov Promises Doping Crackdown

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ACAPULCO, Mexico — Russia will clamp down on doping in the run-up to the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Zhukov said Saturday.

Russia's reputation for doping among skiers and biathletes prompted a warning from the International Ski Federation in June to clean up its act or risk a ban on its athletes for their home games.

International Olympic Committee president Jacques Rogge had raised worries about doping with President Dmitry Medvedev earlier this year.

"We don't want excellence at any price," said Zhukov, who is also president of the Russian Olympic Committee. "The fight against doping is a major priority. Sochi 2014 has given Russia a strong determination to show zero tolerance."

Zhukov is part of a Russian delegation in Mexico to update a meeting of Olympic associations on Sochi's preparations for the 2014 games.

The Russian Ski Federation has fired at least eight cross-country coaches and support staff

who worked with athletes caught using the banned blood-booster EPO since the warning from skiing's governing body in June.

Three-time Olympic cross-country ski champion Yulia Chepalova is among several Russians serving a two-year suspension.

In June, the International Ski Federation ordered her coach and father, Anatoly Chepalov, to be removed from any position of authority and banned from contact with athletes in the Russian ski body.

It also fined Russia \$183,000 and demanded improvements in how it educated athletes and worked with the national anti-doping agency.

The International Ski Federation warned that its rules allowed for countries with serious doping issues to be suspended from competition for four years — which could have excluded Russian skiers in all disciplines at the Sochi Games.

International Ski Federation president Gian Franco Kasper said Friday that he was "very optimistic" that the reorganized Russian Ski Federation would meet a Nov. 1 deadline to show it has cleaned up its act.

The ruling council of the International Ski Federation will assess Russia's progress at a Nov. 6 meeting at its headquarters in the Swiss town of Oberhofen.

Following Zhukov's speech Saturday, Rogge called on all governments to work with sports bodies to root out doping networks.

Rogge said doping was a serious threat to public health and tackling the problem required cooperation between governments and sports authorities.

"We have made great strides but we need even more help from governments. By working together we can dismantle doping operations and punish those involved," Rogge said.

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