The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Organizers Are '99% Ready' for Championship

By Alec Luhn

April 21, 2011



Dancing on ice. Russia's pantheon of figure skaters, such as Olympic gold medalists Tatyana Navka, left, and Roman Kostomarov, could be expanded at next week's Worlds in Moscow. **Adam Berry**

How can you do 2 1/2 years of work in one month?

That was the question before a working group of Russian officials after the International Skating Union announced March 24 that Moscow would replace disaster-beset Japan as host of the 2011 World Figure Skating Championships. That meant Russia needed to prepare for tens of thousands of fans, reporters, photographers, staffers and skaters – and all by the end of April.

"This is an unprecedented occurrence ... that the world championships were organized" this fast, said Alexander Gorshkov, president of the Russian Figure Skating Federation. His group has worked with the Directorate of Sport and Entertainment Events, federal officials and local officials to organize the championships.

"It probably deserves to be entered into the Guinness Book of World Records," Gorshkov added.

The championship will run April 24 through May 1 at Moscow's Megasport Arena, the city's premier ice sports venue.

Originally set for Tokyo and scheduled to begin March 21, the event was turned on its head on March 11, when an earthquake, tsunami and nuclear plant disaster struck Japan. The Japan Skating Federation backed out of hosting because of the country's staggering catastrophe. The Russian Figure Skating Federation then submitted an application to host and beat out the national skating federations of Austria, Canada, Croatia, Finland and the United States to become the new location.

The governing body chose the Megasport Arena following promises by the Russian federation to help with "easy access to entry visas and security," according to the ISU announcement in March.

But the question remains: Has Moscow sucessfully organized in just one month an event that, Gorshkov said, normally takes 2 1/2 years to put together? Thanks to the right connections and an apparently unlimited budget, the answer is yes, event organizers maintain.

The final price tag of the championships could be about 200 million rubles ($7.8 million), according to organizers. The cost of the event will be shouldered completely by the Russian side. Most of the funding will come from the city coffers, with some help from the federal government and private sponsors, said Andrei Petrov, director of the DSZM press service.

City Hall hadn't responded to requests for information by Thursday evening.

Organizers contacted for this article couldn't say what the maximum amount for the event's budget would be. But Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said in March that the government could "easily take care of all costs."

Gorshkov said that "without the help of government structures, many questions would have been tough to decide, including the visa question."

Virtually all visitors to Russia must obtain a visa to enter the country, even for a few hours. But participants in the championships will be able to receive a visa upon landing in Moscow with a visa invitation, RIA-Novosti reported this month.

The only revenue generated by the event will come from ticket sales, which could bring in a maximum of 44 million rubles, DSZM head Alexander Polinsky said. As of the end of this week, 80 percent of all tickets had been sold, said Igor Kurilkin, DSZM deputy general director of advertising and marketing. Almost all of the remaining seats are for April 25 and 26, when the competition's preliminary skating will be held, Kurilkin said.

To organize the event in such a short time, the city tapped DSZM for its organizational experience, which includes the organization of about 20 European championships and world championships since its inception in 2002, Petrov said.

Staff from the Russian Olympic Committee also are going to participate in the organization

of the championship. That will serve as a rehearsal for the 2014 Olympic Games, said the press office for the Organizing Committee Sochi 2014.

But despite the directorate's experience in arranging accommodation, transport, catering and marketing for large sporting events, the logistic hurdles of putting together the competition were difficult given the time crunch, Petrov admitted.

"Metaphorically speaking, a small piece of the tsunami and a piece of the earthquake arrived here from Japan," he said of the organizational process.

Up to 70,000 fans will attend the event, along with 530 accredited journalists, the directorate said. In addition, the directorate must arrange lodging and transport for more than 3,000 athletes, coaches, judges and other officials.

DSZM chose Megasport as the venue because of its longstanding relationship with the stadium's directors, Petrov said. Moreover, for the past three years Megasport has hosted the Cup of Russia, an ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating series event. Although no ice could be laid at the stadium before the end of the semi-finals of the Federation Cup in tennis on April 17, the ice would be prepared to ISU standards by Friday, Petrov said.

For lodging, the directorate presented the ISU with hotels near the stadium, from which the organization chose Aerostar, Renaissance Monarch Center and Kassado Plaza, Petrov said.

In the month leading up to the event, Aerostar had to free up 270 of its 307 rooms during the week of the championships for athletes, as well as team leaders and doctors, the hotel told The Moscow Times.

"There were problems. We had to cancel some reservations," said Aerostar Deputy Commercial Director Tatyana Savelyeva. "But we worked it out so we could do so without insulting our partners," she added.

The hotel gave the travel agency of the International Skating Union a discount for booking rooms, Savelyeva said. She declined to provide the amount of the discount.

Skating fans from outside Moscow – City Hall has estimated that 5,000 fans would come from abroad, Kommersant reported – may not be so lucky. Some hotels are planning to raise their prices 10 percent to 15 percent for the championships, the newspaper reported last month.

At the Marriott Tverskaya, located about two kilometers from Megasport, all standard rooms reserved during the week of the championship were booked at the normal price of 15,000 rubles before tax, or for even less, an employee of the hotel's booking department said in an interview.

However, she admitted that currently, all standard rooms were reserved for these dates and only higher-priced rooms were available, including luxury rooms, two-room suites and business suites. The prices for two-room suites begin at 18,500 rubles before tax, she said.

Transportation is also a major issue. The city has set aside 50 buses to shuttle fans

and participants from Domodedovo and Sheremetyevo airports, RIA-Novosti reported in April.

The true test of Moscow's preparation for the international sporting event, however, will happen once teams start arriving – and that will be on Saturday.

Gorshkov said organizers couldn't possibly deal with every detail in the way a longer preparation would have allowed, but the city would be "99 percent" ready by the time of the participants' arrival.

"Today we were at a session of the mayoral organizing committee," Gorshkov recounted on Wednesday. "Judging by all appearances, everything should be ready on time."

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/04/21/organizers-are-99-ready-for-championship-a6526