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Sochi Games to Get a Head Start

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Yelena Isinbayeva, already a two-time Olympic champion, will be hoping to add to her medal haul at this year's London games.

LONDON — The sporting events of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi will start a day early.

For the first time at a winter games, competition will begin a day before the opening ceremony.

Qualifying events in figure skating, freestyle skiing and snowboarding will take place Feb. 6, 2014, to give organizers "breathing space," IOC sports director Christophe Dubi said.

The opening ceremony is on Feb. 7, and the games run until Feb. 23. That means the actual period of the games will cover 18 days rather than the standard 17.

The Sochi Olympics will feature 98 medal events, 12 more than the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver.

Dubi said qualifying would be held Feb. 6 in the men's and pairs short program in figure skating, women's moguls in freestyle and men's snowboard slopestyle.

The move builds contingency into the packed sports schedule and makes it possible for more athletes to attend the opening ceremony the next day, when no competitions will be held, Dubi said Wednesday.

The first medal events will be on Feb. 8.

Competitions have been scheduled on the day of the opening ceremony at previous winter games, but this will be the first time events will be held a day before, Dubi said.

Events at the much bigger summer games usually start a few days before the opening ceremony.

The women's football tournament kicked off with two games Wednesday, two days before the official opening of the London Olympics.

Among the new events approved by the IOC last year for Sochi are women's ski jumping, men's and women's slopestyle, men's and women's ski half-pipe, and mixed relay in biathlon as well as team events in luge and figure skating.

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