

# Russia Finishes 2nd at Paralympics

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Yelena Ivanova celebrating her win in the women's 100-meter T36 final at the Paralympic Games in London. The Russian team finished second overall. **Andrew Winning**

The nation's Paralympic team came in second overall at the London games, winning 36 gold, 38 silver and 28 bronze medals.

They fared much better than their regular Olympic counterparts, who came in fourth with 24 gold, 25 silver and 33 bronze. The Paralympians' medal tally was also twice that of their previous summer finish in Beijing, where they placed eighth.

"The results have exceeded all our expectations," Oleg Smolin, a first deputy president of the Paralympic Committee told The Moscow Times on Monday.

"We came in second in the gold medal tally," Smolin said, adding that Russia took part in only 12 of the 20 disciplines.

Smolin said that although the team did not have an official medal forecast from the get-go,

Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Kozak believed that the team would end up in the top five.

Runner Yelena Ivanova became a star of the games, winning three gold medals in racing events. This was her first Paralympics.

"I can't even express my feelings. My dreams came true and there is nothing more to dream about," Ivanova, a Chuvashia resident who suffers from cerebral palsy, told R-Sport agency last week.

Swimmer Oksana Savchenko took home five gold medals, the most of any member of the Russian team, and claimed a world record in the 50 meters freestyle.

"She is just simply a very beautiful woman whose stature and character could put her among the best in the Olympic team if not for her problems with eyesight," said Andrei Mitkov, chief editor of the All Sport news agency, who worked as a press attache for the Paralympic team in Beijing.

Smolin said a combination of "fighting spirit" and state support for the athletes helped the Russian team achieve its spectacular results.

Observers said the appointment of seasoned politician and former ambassador to the United States Vladimir Lukin to head the Paralympic Committee played a positive role in bringing attention to the sport.

"He is a political figure, an ideological banner," the All Sports agency's Mitkov said about Lukin, who has been re-elected several times since his first appointment in 1997.

Lukin, who praised the Paralympic team's performance at the London games, also cautioned the athletes to not "exaggerate the significance" of their achievements.

"The Russian athletes trailed too far behind the Chinese, who prepared for the games very seriously," Lukin said, Itar-Tass reported Sunday. The first-place Chinese team got twice as many medals as second-place Russia.

Lukin is scheduled to accompany the Paralympic medal winners when they meet President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday to be awarded with medals and cash prizes.

The gold medal winners are expected to get 100,000 euros (\$130,000), silver winners — 60,000 euros, and bronze winners — 40,000 euros. The sums are equivalent to those given to regular Olympic winners.

Officials have noted that considerable funding played a role in helping the Russian Paralympians.

In June, a Paralympic training center was opened in the Tula region after a 1.7 billion ruble (\$54 million) refurbishment.

"The disabled athletes are grateful because they were not used to financial support," Smolin said.

But he said more money is needed to achieve higher results in more expensive sports like horse riding. "Today we are more successful in the less-expensive types of sports," he said.

The government started to pay more attention to the Paralympics team after a remarkable winter games in Vancouver in 2010.

The Paralympic team came in second overall, trumping their regular Olympic counterparts, who came in 11th.

This year, the Paralympic team has made top officials happy once again.

"Our Paralympic team performed brilliantly in London. They are extremely brave and strong people. Well done!" Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said in English on Twitter on Monday.

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