

# Moscow Gears Up for Athletics World Championships

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Tyson Gay and Asafa Powell competing in a race in Greece back in 2009. **Thannasis Stavrakis**

Moscow's Luzhniki stadium is getting its finishing touches for the 2013 IAAF World Championships in Athletics, and officials say the city is ready to welcome 2,500 athletes from 205 countries for the event.

Although it is smaller in scale than many other events Russia is set to host in the next decade, Aug. 10 to 18 will be Russia's first time hosting the biannual sporting event, and it is seen as a stepping stone to the upcoming Winter Olympic Games in Sochi.

Moscow authorities have thus taken the task quite seriously, and according to Essar Gabriel, the secretary general of IAAF, they have done a good job.

"What we have seen this morning is that everything is being done right, so we will have a fantastic version of the world championships here in Moscow," Gabriel said.

According to Gabriel, City Hall has made an effort to spare visitors from the headache of traffic jams, promising that championship-designated vehicles could use lanes reserved for public transportation. In addition, traffic in Moscow is generally at its lowest in August, he said.

Great effort has also been put into ensuring safety for visitors at the event. Security has always been of primary concern for organizers of sporting events in Russia, which comes as no surprise in light of recent calls for the use of "maximum force" to stop the Olympic Games in Sochi by Doku Umarov, a Chechen insurgency leader and Russia's most wanted man.

After the Boston marathon bombings in April, the championship's organizers decided to put metal detectors along the entire course of the marathon, which will span Moscow's embankments from the red walls of the Kremlin to the Luzhniki complex via Christ the Savior Cathedral.

The park zone around the stadium will also be fenced, with metal detectors at every entrance.

At a news conference Tuesday, organizers said tickets for the event are likely to sell out.

"We would recommend that those who plan to come hurry up and get tickets, since 75-85 percent of them have already been sold," said Alexander Polinsky, a Moscow official who is responsible for organizing the championship.

It is perhaps not surprising that demand is high, as Usain Bolt, widely regarded as one of the fastest runners ever, will be defending his title of world champion in several track distances at the event.

The Luzhniki stadium, Russia's biggest sports venue, will be able to accommodate 35,000 spectators, according to Polinsky, with the price tag for tickets running from 100 rubles (\$3) to 5,000 (\$154).

Following recent doping scandals, with sprinters Asafa Powell and Sherone Simpson as well as discus thrower Allison Randall testing positive for drugs, fears have arisen that the event may see fewer spectators than expected.

But IAAF's secretary general dismissed those concerns.

"I don't think that will be the case because the best athletes will still be in Moscow, and we heard some of these athletes express eagerness to come," Gabriel said.

The track and field championship has largely been overshadowed by the Sochi Games and will not draw nearly as much public attention. Russia has embarked upon a marathon of large-scale sporting events recently, with President Vladimir Putin opening the 27th Summer Universiade in Kazan on July 6.

Despite being less significant in the sports world, the Universiade appeared to be a showcase of Russia's ability to host large-scale events, displaying a complete overhaul of Kazan's infrastructure that cost \$6.8 billion.

No new venues were built for the athletics championship, however; it is widely regarded more

as an important sporting event than an opportunity to invest in public infrastructure.

Valentin Balakhnichyov, president of the Russian Athletics Association, confirmed that notion, calling the Universiade "the second most important sporting event after the world championship."

The Russian government has placed great significance on the major sporting events to be held in Russia over the next decade, saying they will help define a "new Russia" and give Russians more confidence in general, and also make a lasting contribution to the country's infrastructure.

The championship will be the last large-scale sporting event to be held at the iconic Luzhniki stadium, famous for holding the 1980 Olympic Games opening and closing ceremonies, before it closes down for renovations for the 2018 World Cup.

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