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Russia Pins Its Hopes for Olympic Gold on Figure Skating

By Jennifer Monaghan

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Trainer Alexander Zhulin on Saturday. **Maxim Bogodvid**

Russian figure skaters will take to the ice Saturday evening knowing their country sits atop the team figure skating table, with two of eight disciplines already completed.

Thirty out of a possible 80 points are available Saturday evening in three team disciplines — ice dance short, ladies short and freestyle pair — with the remaining three rounds scheduled to take place on Sunday.

Points in the team event are awarded on the basis of positions, with first place taking 10 points, second place taking nine points, and 10th place taking just one point.

Ekaterina Bobrova and Dmitry Soloviev — who have skated together since 2000 — will represent Russia in the ice-dance short, with 15-year old Yulia Lipnitskaya skating in the team ladies short.

Russian duo Tatiana Volosozhar and Maxim Trankov — who gave a stellar performance Thursday evening to take 10 points in the team pair's short — will be returning to the ice Saturday to compete in the freestyle pair competition.

Russia currently tops the team table with a total of 19 points, after Evgeni Plushenko added to Volosozhar and Trankov's victory on Thursday with a second-place finish in the team men's short.

Plushenko — winner of three Olympic medals and three World Figure Skating Championships — is one of the Games' home stars, but was a controversial inclusion to the Russian squad given recent injury concerns.

The 31-year-old star has battled knee and spinal problems since 2010, though his performance on Thursday night — and the nine points it accrued for the Russian team — will have done much to placate his detractors.

The Sochi 2014 Olympics mark the debut of team figure skating as an event, which comes alongside the usual individual contests in men's, women's, ice dance and pairs.

Canada, with 17 points, currently occupies second place in the team event, while China sits in third position with 15 points. The U.S. team lie down in seventh.

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