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Russia Tops Paralympic Medal Table After Opening Day in Sochi

By The Moscow Times

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Russia won a total of 14 medals on Saturday, including four gold medals in the biathlon. (Alexei Filippov / RIA Novosti)

SOCHI — Host nation Russia dominated the first day of the Winter Paralympics in Sochi, finishing top of the medal table with four golds.

All of Russia's wins on Saturday came in biathlon, as the hosts streaked past early leader Germany to the top of the standings, suggesting Russia could end the March 7-16 Paralympics as the most successful nation, matching its achievement at last month's Olympics.

The host nation also won six silver and four bronze medals from other biathlon and Alpine skiing events.
"Of course, we expected such a successful performance. Our team is very well prepared," Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko said Saturday.

"There are very many races ahead of us, so we are expecting more medals. Our athletes will please us yet further."

Meanwhile, after ruling out a boycott of the Games for now, Ukraine won a gold medal with five-time Winter Paralympian Vitaliy Lukyanenko's victory in the men's 7.5km visually impaired biathlon event.

President Vladimir Putin flitted between venues, congratulating several Russian athletes on their medals.
However, the day ended in bittersweet style for Putin as he watched Russia's sledge hockey team lose 3-2 to South Korea on a shootout.

Russia led 2-0 early in the second period as Vasily Varlakov scored one goal and assisted Evgeny Petrov for the second, but the Koreans soon fought back.

In the other game in Group B, youth was the key to victory for the U.S., which beat Italy 5-1 on two goals from 15-year-old Brody Roybal and a 1+1 game from 16-year-old Declan Farmer.

In Group A, Canada smashed Sweden 10-1, while medal contender Norway narrowly avoided an embarrassing slip against outsider the Czech Republic, taking a 2-1 shootout win in the first game of the day at the Shayba arena in the Olympic Park.

In the Alpine skiing, there were thrills and spills on a tricky Rosa Khutor downhill course, especially in the men's sitting event, which saw several heavy crashes. U.S. skier Tyler Walker was airlifted to hospital and is in a "stable and conscious" state, the team said.

Slovakian skier Henrieta Farkasova won her fourth career Paralympic gold in the women's visually impaired event, which also saw Jade Etherington take silver for Britain, ending an eight-year wait for her country to win a Winter Paralympic medal.

The first day of wheelchair curling action saw Canada sweep into a 2-0 lead at the top of the standings, beating Britain 6-3 in the morning and Russia 5-4 in the afternoon.

Russia, skipped by Andrei Smirnov, finished the day on a 1-1 record, after beating China 5-4 in the morning.

Vancouver silver medalist Korea was destroyed by Norway 10-0 in the morning session, but then improved to beat the U.S. 9-5, while the Scandinavians went on to lose 7-3 to China, underlining the unpredictability of the tournament.
Sunday sees a total of five gold medals on offer in Alpine and cross-country skiing, while the hockey and curling preliminaries continue.

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