

Russian to Become Mandatory for Foreign Athletes

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Foreign athletes in Russia's sports clubs will soon have to learn Russian if a State Duma deputy gets his way, Izvestia newspaper reported Thursday.

Oleg Nilov, a deputy for the Just Russia party, is preparing a bill to that effect aimed at reducing the number of foreign athletes in Russia, the paper reported.

"Athletes who earn billions in rubles and millions in dollars must respect our country, know its language and culture," Nilov said in an interview with Vesti FM radio station Thursday.

According to Nilov, the number of foreign sportsmen, especially in football, should first be reduced, and later the practice of inviting players from abroad should be abandoned altogether.

A new law that comes into force on Jan. 1 next year will make it mandatory for migrants who wish to stay in Russia and obtain permanent residence here to pass a test of their Russian-language skills.

Many of Russia's top football clubs are either owned or sponsored by government organizations, meaning that the players' salaries are paid by the government.

"In the present circumstances we need to save money," Nilov told Izvestia.

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