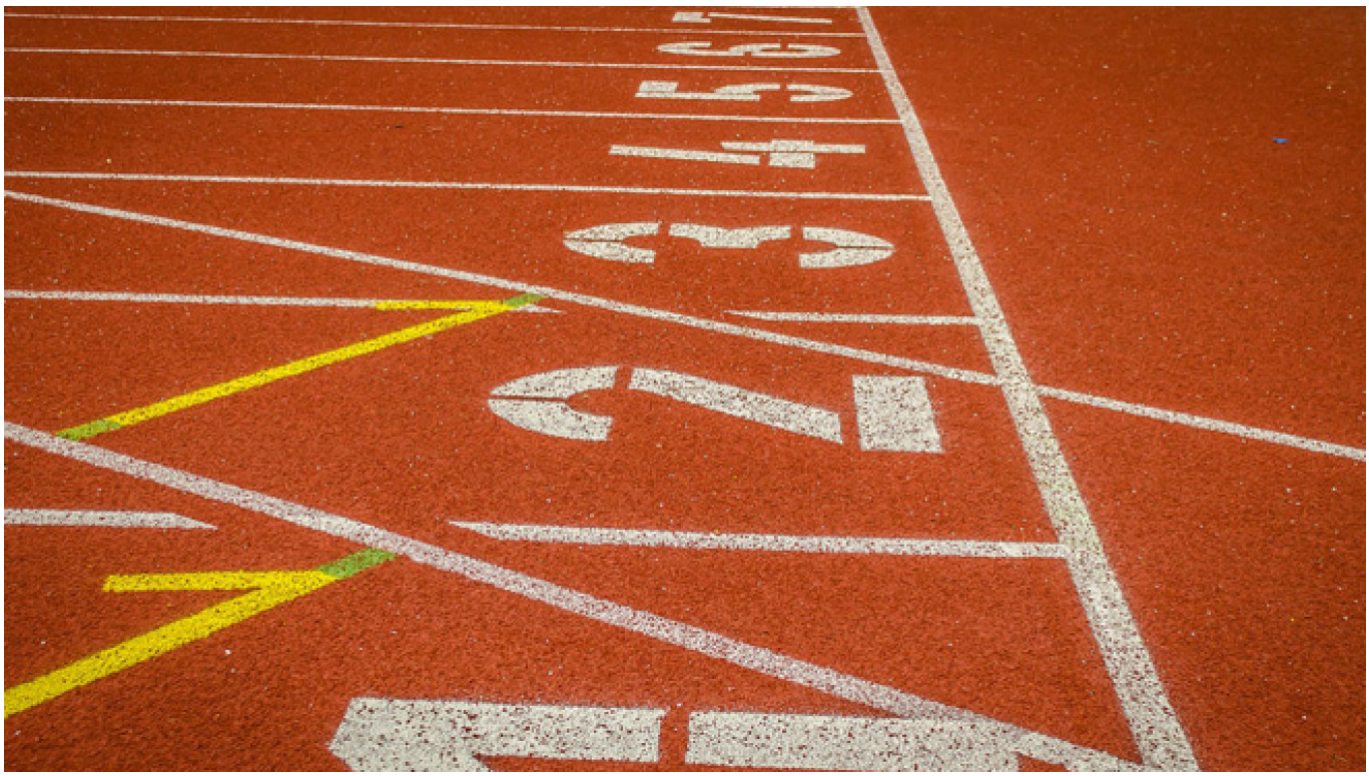
The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Lawmakers to Consider Bill Limiting Number of Foreign Athletes

February 17, 2015



The heads of Russia's major leagues have hinted in the past months that the country's sporting circuits could be purged of its foreigners.

The Sports, Tourism and Youth Policy Ministry has moved to limit the number of foreign athletes that can play for Russian teams.

In mid-December, Minister Vitaly Mutko criticized a proposal by the Russian Football Union to allow 10 foreign players on each team, saying a stricter limit was needed to "protect Russian players and give them the opportunity to practice, at least until the 2018 FIFA World Cup," newspaper Kommersant reported.

A bill seeking to limit the number of foreign athletes, coaches and training staff for Russian sports leagues was submitted to the State Duma by the sports ministry, according to a statement published on the government's information portal Tuesday.

The bill would set in stone the procedure for the government to hire foreign athletes for Russia's national teams and limit the number of foreign athletes in the country.

The specific requirements were not listed in the legislation published online.

Each Russian sports league currently decides for itself how many foreign players to allow within its ranks.

The heads of Russia's major leagues have hinted in the past months that the country's sporting circuits could be purged of its foreigners. In December, KHL president Dmitry Chernyshenko said that the league — whose generous salaries have attracted North American and European hockey players — would shift its focus to serving the interests of the Russian national team.

"A strong league is a strong national team," Chernyshenko said at a meeting of general managers of KHL clubs in Sochi in December, according to the league's website. "This is a populist slogan for us. It is deliberate, important governmental mission. We completely understand that the KHL is a commercial league and that our success is the success of the national team."

Russian KHL clubs currently limit themselves to five foreign players.

In accordance with the proposed legislation, the sports ministry would have the final say on the number of foreign players allowed to each sports team.

The Russian Football Premier League currently abides by a scheme in which no more than seven foreign players are allowed on the field at once.

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