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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Olympic Team Could be Reduced to 40 Athletes

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Members of Russia's Olympic team arrive at the airport in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. **Pilar Olivares / Reuters**

Russia's Olympic team could consist of just 40 people, with up to 90 percent of Russia's athletes still facing exclusion from the competition, Britain's Telegraph newspaper reported Monday.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) decided Sunday against a blanket ban on the country's athletes, despite reports of widespread state-backed doping across a host of sports.

The IOC instead gave individual sporting federations the responsibility to determine on a case by case basis if athletes are eligible to compete. Any Russian sportsperson with a previous doping conviction will not be eligible and the IOC will also employ an independent expert to catch doping cheats who have not undergone sufficiently rigorous testing in the run-up to the Olympics, the Telegraph reported.

Some experts have claimed that the measures could reduce the Russian team from 387

athletes to just 40.

Only the international tennis, triathlon and archery federations have announced Russian competitors as eligible to compete so far.

Russia's track and field team was barred from competing after the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) upheld the team's original ban for doping offenses on July 21. Russia is also waiting on the result of a CAS appeal against a total ban against its weightlifting team.

Russia's embattled sports minister Vitaly Mutko wrote to the president of the International Athletics Association, Sebastian Coe, on Monday asking for "clean" Russian athletes to be allowed to compete using the same criteria as other sportspeople.

Mutko admitted to a doping crisis in Russian athletics, but used two-time Olympic champion pole vaulter Yelena Isinbayeva to highlight the injustice done to clean athletes. Isinbayeva has an "impeccable reputation, confirmed by a huge number of drugs tests by various anti-doping organizations," he said. "Responsibility should be individual. Honest individuals should not answer for the crimes of others."

The only Russian track and field athlete currently allowed to compete in Rio is long jumper Darya Klishina, who will do so under a neutral flag.

Runner Yulia Stepanova, whose revelations in a documentary for German TV channel ARD originally led to the doping investigation into Russian athletics, fails to meet the IOC criteria due to a previous doping offense. The IOC invited Stepanova and her husband Vitaly Stepanov to attend the Olympics as spectators, an invitation they declined.

The World Anti Doping Agency (WADA) earlier expressed disappointment with the IOC decision to stop Stepanova from competing.

WADA director general Olivier Niggli expressed the organization's "worry about the message this send to people who want to give evidence (of doping) in the future," RBC reported.

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