

Crowds 'Paid' to See Off Russia's Olympic Team

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Sergei Karpukhin / Reuters

Russian “sports fans” were paid to cheer Russia’s Olympic team at a Moscow airport as they departed for Rio, the Gazeta.ru news website reported Friday.

An advert was placed on Russian social network site VKontakte for “young and active people to see our athletes off to the Rio Olympics.”

The advert told participants to come in Russian team kit, “wave flags and smile.”

Participants gathered at a meeting point in central Moscow at 2:30 am and were taken by taxi to the city’s Sheremetyevo Airport, Gazeta.ru reported.

After cheering a group of roughly 70 Russian athletes leaving for Brazil, the participants collected 500 rubles (\$7) in payment, the newspaper wrote.

Russia has had a turbulent build up to this summer’s Olympic Games, with 110 of Russia’s 387

competitors so far banned from competing. Their exclusion follows a damning report by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) on the “state-sponsored” doping program within the country.

A reception was hosted at the Kremlin on Thursday for around 100 members of Russia’s Olympic squad, during which President Vladimir Putin called the ban “open discrimination” and an “attempt to bring the rules of world politics into sport.”

The organizer of the send-off event echoed Putin’s statements, telling participants that “this is awful for our sportsmen and women. They’re not letting [our athletes] compete for political reasons.”

“They are going to Rio in an atmosphere of hate and they will compete surrounded by enemies. They need our help like never before,” the organizer said.

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