

Ukraine's Olympic Athletes Warned to Avoid Russian Media

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The  **Moscow Times**

Ukraine's Sports Minister has warned the country's Olympic team to avoid the Russian media during the competition in Rio de Janeiro.

"The team has been given very clear instructions to avoid all contact with the Russian media. They have been warned more than once," minister Igor Zhdanov wrote on his Facebook page.

His comments were made in relation to a news report by a Russian state TV channel where Ukrainian team members were interviewed as they traveled to Brazil. The athletes were asked to comment on rulings which have seen Russia's entire track-and-field team banned from competing, as well as any Russian athlete with a history of doping offenses.

Ukrainian sprinter Yelyzaveta Bryzgina, who has previously served a two year ban for doping, told the news crew that "everyone makes mistakes. If you have served your

punishment, then you should be allowed to compete. The same rules should apply for everyone. We know it's linked to politics.”

Her words were followed by a comment from the Russian reporter, who remarked, “even drugs-cheat Bryzgina understands that Russia's athletes have been illegally punished.”

Zhdanov said that Russian propagandists had provoked Ukraine's athletes to catch them off guard. “They didn't realize the political consequences of their words,” Zhdanov said, stressing that the Olympic team was comprised of athletes who “spend 90 percent of their time training and don't closely follow politics.”

“This wouldn't have happened without the distortion of Russian television. It's an unpleasant situation which the whole team regrets, and we're doing everything so that it won't happen again,” he said.

More than 100 members of Russia's Olympic Squad were excluded from competing under the ban from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which came into force after reports of widespread, state-backed doping across Russian sport.

The IOC resisted calls from the World Anti-Doping Agency last month to ban Russia's entire Olympic team, and passed the responsibility of deciding athletes' eligibility to compete onto individual sporting federations

. The International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) decided to ban all but one of Russia's track-and-field athletes.

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