

Russia's Olympians Brace for the Worst as IOC Decision Looms

The IOC last month stripped nine Russian Olympians of medals won in Sochi in 2014 over doping

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Valery Sharifulin / TASS

With the International Olympic Committee (IOC) set to decide Tuesday evening on the Russian team's participation in the 2018 Winter Games, Russian athletes and politicians are bracing for the worst.

The looming decision follows last month's World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) ruling that, for the third consecutive year, Russia's anti-doping body is not meeting international standards.

Russian sport has been mired in scandal since revelations of a state-sponsored doping

scheme were uncovered following the 2014 Games in Sochi.

Restrictions floated in advance of the IOC decision include allowing clean Russian Olympians to compete in unmarked uniforms and without the national anthem or flag.

In a worst-case scenario, some have predicted that the Russian Olympic team could be barred from participating at the games in February altogether. But in interviews with the Moscow Times, current and former members of Russia's Winter Olympic team said they hoped the team will be allowed to participate.

Maria Sorokina, a goalkeeper on the women's hockey team, said she hopes "for the best."

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"The decision is already known," she added. "It will simply be announced tonight."

Dmitry Vasiliev, a Soviet-era biathlete, told The Moscow Times that he hopes the decision will go "in our favor."

"The IOC won't want to make such a historic decision, so as not to set off a chain reaction," he said. "I hope that they have decent people there who will make the correct decision."

Former biathlete and current Russian politician, Sergei Chepikov, said that he would not like to comment before the decision is made. But, he said, "there are definitely more negatives in all this than positives."

Last month, the IOC [stripped](#) nine Russian Olympians of medals won in Sochi in 2014 because of doping. Before the decision, one of Russia's medalists [offered](#) the committee a defiant proposal.

"Come here, to my motherland, and try to take it," bobsledder Alexei Voevoda said.

The Kremlin held back on officially commenting on Tuesday's IOC decision today, the state-run RIA Novosti news agency [reported](#). On Monday, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov [assured](#) reporters that the Russian government was not considering boycotting the Games in February.

But on Tuesday, news anchors at the Defense Ministry's Zvezda television outlet wore shirts with the five-ringed Olympics logo and the words "No Russia, No Games" printed across the front. The outlet also included the hashtag "#norussianogames" in Instagram posts of the anchors clad in the shirts.

Embed:



A post shared by Телеканал "Звезда" (@zvezdanews) on Dec 4, 2017 at 11:42pm PST

Russian sports channel Match TV ran a poll on its [homepage](#) asking its readers to answer what the country's Olympians should do if the IOC forces them to compete in neutral uniforms without a flag or hymn. Sixty three percent of respondents voted in support of boycotting the Games.

Over the past month, the atmosphere in Russia surrounding the Olympic team's unknown future has been fraught. The country's top lawmakers have repeatedly claimed that the doping scandal is a political conspiracy.

President Vladimir Putin, for one, has [claimed](#) that the United States instigated the scandal to influence Russia's presidential elections scheduled for March 2018.

"In response to our supposed interference in their elections, they want to cause problems in the Russian presidential election," he said last month.

Last week, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev [echoed](#) those comments during his annual question and answer session with journalists broadcast on state-run television.

"This discussion has become wholly political," he said. "It has become the main topic of the anti-Russian campaign."

Reporting was contributed by Anastasia Shchepina

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