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Most Russian Olympians Agree to Compete Under Neutral Flag

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Costa Anastasakis / Bloomberg News

Most Russian athletes have agreed to take part in the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea without Russia's flag or national anthem, Russian sports officials said Monday.

Last week, the International Olympic Committee ruled to bar Russian athletes and officials from next year's Olympic Games for state-sponsored doping dating back to the 2014 Winter Games in Sochi.

The committee said it would allow clean Russian athletes to compete under a neutral flag at the coming games if they could prove to a panel that they were clear of doping.

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"We spoke with all of the athletes from each category of winter sports," the Interfax news

service cited Sofia Velikaya, a Russian Olympics Committee official, as saying Monday. "The majority of Russian athletes want to take part in the Olympics."

"I ask the Russian public to treat the decision with respect and understanding," Velikaya added.

Before the IOC's announcement, several Russian officials and athletes called for a boycott of the games in case of a negative verdict.

President Vladimir Putin, who was expected to issue a tough response to the ban, admitted Russia was at least partially to blame for the IOC's decision and said the country would not boycott the Olympics as a result.

Putin had previously said that the expected ban was evidence of Western antagonism in the run-up to Russia's 2018 presidential elections.

Even so, Velikaya said her commission intends to appeal the lifetime IOC bans that were handed to several leaders of the Russian team.

"Some of our athletes have already been punished and have served their disqualification [period], she said.

"According to all of the IOC regulations, they have the opportunity to take part in the Olympic Games."

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