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‘We Respect It’: Russia Reacts to Tokyo Olympics’ Coronavirus Postponement

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“The health of athletes, organizers and all IOC member state representatives is clearly the priority," Russia's sports minister said. **Franck Robichon / EPA / TASS**

The International Olympics Committee (IOC) decided on Tuesday to delay the 2020 Tokyo Olympics as the coronavirus pandemic shows little sign of slowing down. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and IOC president Thomas Bach agreed to reschedule the highly anticipated sporting event after pressure from the international community.

Following the news, Russia’s Sports Minister Oleg Matytsin told the state-run TASS news agency that Moscow supports the IOC’s decision to delay the Olympic Games until 2021.

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“This is a joint decision of the IOC and the Japanese leadership and we respect it. At this difficult time, the health of athletes, organizers and all representatives of IOC member states is clearly the priority. We will build our cooperation with national federations on the training

process," TASS quoted Matytsin as saying.

The minister added that a majority of Russia's national athletes are standing by for their regular tournaments to resume once the coronavirus crisis is under control.

"Currently, almost all of the national team members are at their bases. We are working with the sport federations to resolve the issue of further training and the resumption of competitions. We will do everything possible to ensure the training process continues, as the athletes need it," TASS quoted Matytsin as saying.

Mikhail Degtyarev, the chairman of the State Duma's committee for sport, tourism and youth affairs, suggested that next year is more favorable for the Games.

"The decision to delay the Games is correct. I've been talking about this for a while. In the current situation, it is impossible to provide all athletes with equal opportunities in qualifying competitions, guarantee the complete health and safety of athletes and fans and give everyone a real sports festivity," the Sport-Express newspaper quoted Degtyarev as saying.

Last year, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) ruled that Russia had tampered with data from a Moscow doping laboratory. WADA's ruling effectively banned Russia from participating in the upcoming Olympics and other major international sport events for the next four years, including the 2022 Winter Olympics and FIFA World Cup. Russian athletes will only be allowed to compete under a neutral flag and will need to test negative for doping.

The number of confirmed coronavirus cases worldwide has surpassed 420,000. As of Wednesday, Russia's official number of coronavirus cases stood at 658.

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