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Why Russia Can't Compete in the Tokyo Olympics, But Its Athletes Can

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Russian athletes have won 25 medals so far, putting them in the top five. **Valery Sharifulin / TASS**

Russian athletes have won a total of 25 medals in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics under the neutral Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) flag.

Here's our guide to team ROC:

Why can't Russian athletes compete under the Russian flag?

In 2015, the Russian government was accused of doping — administering performance-enhancing drugs to athletes to help them perform better.

Further investigations from the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) into doping resulted in a 2019 four-year ban from any international athletic competitions, including the Olympics, reduced to two years in 2020 by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

Russia has always denied any involvement in state-sponsored doping.

How long will the ban continue for?

The ban on the Russian name, flag and anthem will continue throughout the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympic Games and the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, with Russian athletes continuing to compete under the ROC flag.

How are Russian athletes still allowed to compete in the Olympics?

The WADA ruling allowed drug-free athletes to compete under neutral flags with no anthem, an action dubbed "honorable surrender."

According to the International Olympic Committee (IOC), these athletes are not competing for the Russian Federation, but for the ROC. Russian symbols and flags have been banned from official imagery for the Olympics

Where are the Russian flag and anthem banned?

The Russian flag will not be flown nor the country's national anthem performed during official opening and closing ceremonies and medal presentations in official Olympic arenas.

During the opening ceremony Russian athletes carried the ROC flag rather than the Russian flag, and a Tchaikovsky piece was played in lieu of an anthem.

Their kits, however, are allowed to contain the red, white and blue colors of the Russian flag, and while organizers have banned the flying of the Russian flag in official arenas many hotels are still flying the tricolor.

What have been the reactions to the ruling?

Critics claim that using ROC is a loophole and that, to all intents and purposes, Russian athletes are still representing Russia as a nation.

Labels aside, Russian athletes remain in the top five aggregate medal-earners. Despite the technical neutrality, many Russians still support the ROC, treating the athletes as representatives of their nation.

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