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Belarusian Athlete Auctions Off Medal for $21,000

By AFP

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Krystsina Tsimanouskaya sought refuge in Poland after she said her team tried to forcibly fly her home from the Tokyo Olympics. **kristi_timanovskaya / instagram**

Athlete Krystsina Tsimanouskaya, who said the Belarus team tried to forcibly fly her home from the Tokyo Olympics and has since sought refuge in Poland, has sold a medal of hers for $21,000, a sports NGO said.

"The medal has now been sold and paid for by a buyer from the U.S. with a very solid track record of transactions on eBay," the Belarusian Sport Solidarity Foundation (BSSF) said on its Telegram.

BSSF — an organization that supports opposition athletes — said Tsimanouskaya's silver medal from the 2019 European Games attracted "a lot of interest" from collectors and patrons of art.

"I didn't expect that it would be bought for such a sum," 24-year-old Tsimanouskaya said as quoted by BSSF, adding that she was "very happy."

The sprinter said she plans to donate the money towards helping athletes like herself who have "suffered."

Related article: Two Belarus Coaches Kicked Out of Olympics Over Tsimanouskaya Removal

Earlier this month, Tsimanouskaya found herself in the international spotlight after she claimed her team was forcing her to leave the Olympic Games in Tokyo early and return to authoritarian Belarus.

The runner spent the night in an airport hotel after seeking protection with Tokyo 2020 officials to avoid getting on a plane. She later defected to Poland.

The uproar erupted after the athlete had criticized the Belarusian athletics federation for entering her into a relay race without giving her notice.

Two Belarusian coaches were stripped of their Olympic accreditation over the incident, which Belarus's strongman leader Alexander Lukashenko denied.

BSSF was founded last August by retired Belarusian swimmer Aliaksandra Herasimenia, as protests erupted after Lukashenko's disputed re-election for a sixth term.

Herasimenia — who now lives in exile in Lithuania — sold her 2012 world championship gold medal to raise funds for the foundation.

It provides financial and legal assistance to athletes targeted by the authorities after calling for an end to the violent police crackdown on demonstrators.

Belarus has been slapped with a slew of Western sanctions over the handling of the protest and human rights violations but retains the support of ally and creditor Russia.

The turmoil has led to Belarus being stripped of hosting this year's ice hockey world championship and a ban on Lukashenko attending Olympic events.

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