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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

5 Russian Athletes to Watch in the Winter Olympics

The Russian Olympic Committee looks strong in skating, skiing and hockey.

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ROC figure skater Anna Shcherbakova practices during a training session at Beijing's Capital Indoor Stadium ahead of the 2022 Winter Olympics. **Valery Sharifulin / TASS**

A total of 212 athletes from Russia will take part in the Winter Olympics, which start on Friday and are being held for the first time in China.

As a result of the World Anti-Doping Agency's 2019 ruling, Russian athletes are banned from competing under the Russian flag, as was the case in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics last year.

Despite being hit by a number of Covid-19 cases, including to 2018 Skeleton medalists Nikita Tregubov and Vladislav Semenov, the head of the Russian Olympic Committee, Stanislav Pozdnyakov, is still hoping for a haul of at least 30 medals in this winter's games.

So which athletes from the Russian Olympic Committee can we expect to see serenaded by Tchaikovsky's piano concerto in Beijing?

Take a look at The Moscow Times' list of Russian athletes to look out for:

Kamila Valieva, skater

At just 15 years old, figure skater Kamila Valieva is the youngest athlete competing in the Games. Despite only breaking onto the professional circuit in 2019, Valieva has taken the sport by storm, winning events by record margins, and holding the world record for the women's short-program and free skating. Born in Kazan, Valieva will come up against tough opposition in Beijing, not only from her own teammates Anna Shcherbakova and Alexandra Trusova, but also the United States' 16-year-old Alysa Lui.

Anna Shcherbakova, skater

The 2021 world figure skating champion, 17-year-old Muscovite Anna Shcherbakova, has won the Russian figure skating championships for the last three years in a row, the first woman to do so since Irina Slutskaya. Despite suffering a bout of pneumonia last year, Shcherbakova comes to the Games as one of the favorites to pick up a medal.

Alexandra Tryusova, skater

The final teen superstar in Russia's figure skating team, 17-year-old Tryusova is the second-ranked female skater in the world after her compatriot Shcherbakova. Born in Ryazan, Tryusova won bronze in last year's world figure skating championships in Stockholm. Tryusova, Shcherbakova and Valieva have dominated singles figure skating over the past year, and they could take all three medals in that event in Beijing.

Alexander Bolshunov, skier

Cross-country skier Alexander Bolshunov, 25, just missed gold in the 2018 games. From Podyvotye, a tiny village of just over 500 people in the Bryansk region, Bolshunov, who is a two-time winner of Tour De Ski, took home three silvers and one bronze in Pyeongchang.

Men's Hockey Team

Russia's men's hockey team won gold in 2018 after beating Germany 4-3 in the final. However, with the number of teams in this year's Games up to 12 from 10, and a disappointing fifth place in last year's world championships, the team will need to overcome tough competition from Finland and Canada if they are to take the gold again this winter.

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