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Russia's Valieva Comes Top in Olympic Figure Skating Short Program

By AFP

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Sergei Bobylev / TASS

Russia's Kamila Valieva placed top in the Olympic figure skating short program Tuesday, after being allowed to compete despite testing positive for a banned substance before the Games.

The 15-year-old scored 82.16, and goes into Thursday's decisive free program with a narrow lead over her compatriot Anna Shcherbakova, who came second with 80.20.

Kaori Sakamoto of Japan is just behind in third place with 79.84, with Russia's Alexandra Trusova, who fell attempting a triple axel, in fourth.

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Despite placing first, Valieva's score was eight marks below what she was awarded when she performed the same routine at the Olympic team event.

She had looked determined as she began her performance, but her skate was not quite as polished as last week and at the end, she broke into tears, breathing heavily.

She collected herself to skate off the ice, but was still visibly distressed.

The teenager did not stop to speak to journalists, but walked straight past them flanked by members of her team, clutching her fluffy tissue box and sobbing.

Valieva had been favorite for gold going into the Olympics, but a week into the Games it emerged she had tested positive in December for trimetazidine, a drug usually used to treat angina but which also boosts endurance.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport ruled on Monday that she could carry on competing in the Chinese capital, although that does not mean that the Russian has been cleared of doping and could still face punishment at a later date.

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