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Russian Gymnast Faces Disciplinary Action After Donning Invasion Symbol

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Federazione Ginnastica d'Italia / YouTube

A Russian gymnast will face disciplinary action for wearing a symbol linked to his country's invasion of Ukraine on the podium of the Apparatus World Cup, the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) said Monday.

Twenty-year-old Ivan Kuliak took to the podium in third place alongside Ukrainian gold medalist Kovtun Illia at the Gymnastics World Cup event in Doha on Saturday. Taped to his vest was the letter "Z" — a newly adopted symbol of support for the Russian military after it was seen painted on the side of tanks heading to Ukraine.

"The International Gymnastics Federation confirms that it will ask the Gymnastics Ethics Foundation to open disciplinary proceedings against Kuliak following his shocking behavior at the Apparatus World Cup," the FIG said.

Despite some critics arguing it was likely that the young gymnast may have been coerced into sporting the symbol, the head coach of the Russian national gymnastics team denied this.

“He didn’t consult with us. It was definitely his personal initiative. Our guys are patriots of Russia,” Valentina Rodioenko told Match TV.

It had previously been ruled that all Russian and Belarusian athletes would be banned from future gymnastic events from Monday due to Moscow’s deadly war in neighboring Ukraine.

“From 7 March 2022, Russian and Belarusian athletes and officials, including judges, are not allowed to take part in FIG competitions or FIG-sanctioned competitions,” the body said in a statement last week.

Russia has been widely criticized by the sporting community for its invasion of Ukraine, with a number of sporting bodies moving to exclude Russia from participating in future events, including the International Hockey Federation suspending Belarusian and Russian national teams and clubs until further notice.

Russian officials have slammed the sweeping backlash against Russian cultural figures and athletes, with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov admitting Wednesday he was surprised by the moves.

“We were ready for sanctions, but we did not expect that they would affect athletes, intellectuals, actors, and media figures,” Lavrov said.

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