The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Paris 2024 Chief Says IOC Has 'Last Word' on Russian Inclusion

By AFP

March 14, 2023



Paris 2024 Olympics chief Tony Estanguet. **Christophe Archambault / AFP**

In an interview to mark 500 days until the start of the Paris Olympics, organizing committee head Tony Estanguet stressed that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) would have the "last word" on whether athletes from Russia and Belarus would be allowed to compete next year.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which was facilitated by its ally Belarus, there have been calls from across the sporting world either to ban athletes from both countries from the Games or compel them to compete under a neutral flag.

Last week, however, the International Fencing Federation (FIE) became the first Olympic sport to reopen events to athletes from the two nations when it decided to allow fencers to compete in Olympic qualifying events, sparking outrage in Ukraine.

"The international federations are currently refining their qualifications, to know if Russian or Belarusian athletes will be allowed to participate in these qualifying competitions," Estanguet told AFP.

Related article: Moscow Says Calls to Ban Russians from Olympics 'Unacceptable'

"And then the IOC, depending on what the international federations have done, even if Russian or Belarusian athletes have qualified, will be able to say whether it will allow them to participate in these Games or not."

"This decision has not been taken. And Paris 2024 is not in a position to decide."

Estanguet said the priority, however, was not the Olympics but "how the situation can be resolved quickly and how we can best support the Ukrainian people, the Ukrainian athletes."

The three-time Olympic gold medallist said he had discussed the issue with French President Emmanuel Macron but stressed that it was "the IOC that has the last word."

Despite the crisis surrounding the ongoing war in Ukraine, Estanguet sounded upbeat as he looked ahead to next year's Olympics and Paralympics in the French capital.

"We feel that all the ingredients are in place for the magic of the Games to work," he said.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/03/14/paris-2024-chief-says-ioc-has-last-word-on-russian-inclusion-a80481