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Russian Olympic Chief Accuses IOC of Siding with Ukraine

By AFP

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Ukraine's Olha Kharlan (L) leaves the fencing strip after she refused to shake hands with Russia's Anna Smirnova. **Andreas Solaro / AFP**

The head of Russia's Olympic Committee on Friday accused the International Olympic Committee of picking sides after it urged sports federations to show sensitivity when handling Ukrainian athletes.

"The statement in question indicates that the IOC determined for itself and picked a side in the political conflict, (and) began to act in the interests of this side," Stanislav Pozdnyakov said on Telegram.

On Thursday, Ukrainian fencer Olha Kharlan was disqualified at the World Fencing Championships in Milan after refusing to shake the hand of her beaten Russian opponent Anna Smirnova.

The rules of the International Fencing Federation (FIE) state that the two fencers must shake hands.

Following the incident, the IOC urged international federations to "handle situations involving Ukrainian and individual neutral athletes with the necessary degree of sensitivity."

According to Pozdnyakov, these remarks "clearly showed the duplicity of the so-called recommendations, criteria and parameters."

"Now we have been involuntarily but clearly shown the attitude which absolutely any Russian will face at international competitions."

"Olympism is officially being made a tool controlled from the outside in the interests of a geopolitical order to neutralize our citizens and organization in sports."

Since Russia launched its offensive in Ukraine, the IOC imposed sporting sanctions on Moscow and its ally Minsk but earlier this year recommended that Russian and Belarusian athletes could compete as individuals under a neutral flag and with no anthem.

The IOC is yet to make a final decision over whether to allow Russians and Belarusians to compete at the Paris Olympics next year.

Pozdnyakov said that if Russian athletes are able to go to Paris, it will be "only a few" and "it remains to be seen what the new conditions will be and at what stage they will be imperatively put forward."

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