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Only 16 Russians Take up Paris Olympic Places

By AFP

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Signs for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games on the facade of the Hotel de Ville in Paris. **Farzaneh Khademian / ABACA / TASS**

Only 16 Russians and 17 Belarusians have accepted invitations to compete under a neutral banner at the Paris Olympics, according to the latest count on Tuesday.

The updated list, which covers 10 disciplines ranging from cycling to swimming and tennis, could change if competitors withdraw, a spokesperson for the International Olympic Committee (IOC) told AFP.

So far, the IOC has counted 19 refusals on the Russian side — including athletes who have changed their minds — and seven by Belarusians, including the world's third and 16th-ranked women's tennis players, Aryna Sabalenka and Victoria Azarenka.

The four Russian judokas invited declined en masse, as did the wrestlers — even though the

IOC still lists Shamil Mamedov as coming to Paris — after their federations denounced the "non-sporting principle of selection" on Saturday.

The Russian gymnasts had announced in advance they would not be attending.

Track and field competitors are all banned by World Athletics.

The IOC has also barred the two countries from any team events.

Athletes from the two countries were banned from world sport following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, but the IOC orchestrated their gradual return under a neutral banner, subject to strict conditions.

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To be invited to the Games, "neutral individual athletes" who achieved good enough results qualify, had to pass a double check, first by the international sports federations and then by the IOC, to ensure they did not actively support the war in Ukraine or have any links with their countries' armies.

The IOC said in March it expected 36 Russians and 22 Belarusians to take part in Paris "according to the most likely scenario," compared with 330 Russians and 104 Belarusians at the Tokyo Olympics in 2020.

There will be three Russians and one Belarusian in cycling; one from each country in trampolining and taekwondo; two Belarusians each in weightlifting, shooting and rowing; Mamedov in wrestling; seven Russians, including Wimbledon semi-finalist Daniil Medvedev, in tennis; three Russians and a Belarusian in canoeing; and one Russian and four Belarusian swimmers.

Athletes will not be allowed to wear national colors but will compete under a green flag embossed with the letters "AIN." The IOC has chosen a wordless anthem to be played if any win gold.

They will not be able to parade on the River Seine during the opening ceremony and will not appear in the medals table.

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