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Court Ruling Clears Path for Russian and Belarusian Skiers to Compete at 2026 Olympics

By AFP

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Marco Bertorello / AFP

The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) on Tuesday overturned a ban that had barred Russian and Belarusian skiers from qualifying for the 2026 Winter Olympics, opening the way for them to compete as neutral athletes.

In a statement, the court said that athletes from the two countries who meet the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) criteria for individual neutral athlete status "should be allowed to participate" in qualification events organized by the International Ski and Snowboard Federation (FIS).

Russian Sports Minister Mikhail Degtyarev welcomed the decision. He called it "the third court ruling in favor of Russia in winter Olympic sports," referring to earlier cases involving

bobsleigh and luge.

FIS announced in October that it would exclude Russian and Belarusian competitors from qualification events for the 2026 Winter Olympics, extending a ban first imposed in 2022 after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

While athletes from the two countries had already been shut out of FIS competitions, they hoped to enter the Olympics under a neutral banner.

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The IOC said in September that Russian and Belarusian athletes could compete in 2026 as neutrals if they met strict conditions, including passing background checks to ensure they had no ties to the military or security services.

FIS's ban aligned with similar positions taken by the international federations for biathlon and luge, though the skating federation allowed Russian and Belarusian athletes to attempt to qualify.

CAS upheld Russian and Belarusian appeals to the ban on the grounds that FIS statutes "protect individuals from discrimination and require the FIS to be politically neutral," the court said.

At the 2022 Beijing Games, Russian athletes won nearly one-third of all medals in cross-country skiing, though they failed to medal in alpine skiing.

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