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After Initial Restraint, Russian State TV Acknowledges Athletes' Olympic Success

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Silver medalist Nikita Filippov of Russia poses during a victory ceremony for the men's ski mountaineering sprint during the 2026 Winter Olympic Games. **Mikhail Tereshchenko / TASS**

Russian state television has started highlighting the achievements of Russian athletes competing as neutrals at the Milano Cortina Winter Olympics after initially offering restrained coverage of the Games.

While the Olympics have long been a setpiece event for Russian television, it has largely ignored this year's Winter Games, as Russian athletes are either competing as neutrals or under other countries' flags due to the invasion of Ukraine.

Channel One led its primetime news bulletin on Thursday with a report on Russian ski mountaineer Nikita Filippov's silver medal, the first medal for a competitor listed as an Individual Neutral Athlete, the exiled news outlet Agentstvo reported.

Filippov "is a new name in the history of world sport — one of those rare cases where that can truly be said about a silver medalist at the Winter Olympic Games. This is Russia's first medal in Italy," the presenter said.

A Channel One correspondent said Filippov "made history" and praised his "incredible strength of spirit, perseverance and a battle with oneself."

"Our 23-year-old Nikita Filippov delivered a silver medal that rings no less brightly than gold," he added.

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On Friday morning, Channel One ran a segment on figure skater Adeliia Petrosyan, who finished sixth in the women's final the previous evening.

State broadcaster Rossia 24 also ran a segment about Filippov and his training.

"Thanks to Filippov, all of Russia now knows about [ski mountaineering]," a Rossia 24 correspondent in Italy said of Filippov's performance.

The pro-Kremlin outlet Komsomolskaya Pravda ran a piece with the headline: "'We've always believed in Nikita — he's a true hero': The family of Kamchatka athlete Nikita Filippov's first reaction."

"He gave it his all, defending the honor of his country even under a neutral flag," the piece said.

Sport Minister and Russian Olympic Committee chief Mikhail Degtyarev also congratulated Filippov on his silver medal despite previously calling for Russian-born athletes who have changed their sporting nationality to be banned from the country.

At least 350 athletes have left Russia since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine four years ago, the exiled news outlet Novaya Gazeta Europe said.

Over 30 Russian athletes who have changed sporting nationality are representing other countries at the 2026 Winter Olympics, with figure skating accounting for the largest share, according to the RBC news website.

Only 15% of surveyed Russians said they were planning to watch the 2026 Winter Olympics.

Only one streaming platform, Okko, acquired broadcast rights inside Russia, and the Games are not being shown on state television.

Ukraine has repeatedly protested the participation of Russian athletes at the Olympics, even though they are permitted only to compete as neutrals without the Russian flag or other symbols.

Rossia 24 on Thursday claimed that Ukraine had "thrown a tantrum" after Russian

Paralympic athletes were allowed to compete under their national flag.

The Ukrainian Paralympic team has said it will boycott the Paralympic Games' opening ceremony on March 6.

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