The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Wins First Winter Paralympic Medals Since 2014

By AFP

March 07, 2026



Members of Russia's delegation take part in the delegation parade as volunteers lead holding the nation's flag and placard during the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Paralympic Games opening ceremony at Arena di Verona in Verona on March 6, 2026. **Stefano Rellandini / AFP**

Russia won its first Winter Paralympic medals since 2014 on Saturday as skiers Varvara Voronchikhina and Aleksei Bugaev each claimed bronze in the women's and men's downhill standing events in Cortina d'Ampezzo.

Despite Russia's ongoing war with Ukraine, the International Paralympic Committee allowed six Russian athletes and four athletes from ally Belarus to compete under their national flags rather than as neutrals.

The decision has drawn some criticism. Seven countries, including Ukraine, boycotted Friday's opening ceremony, while some spectators booed the Russian delegation during the parade of athletes at the Verona Arena.

After winning Russia's first Paralympic medal since the 2014 Games in Sochi, Voronchikhina, 23, said competing under the national flag was meaningful after a long absence.

"For us, it's been a really long time when we were without a flag," she said. "I'm really glad... I'm very happy because it's the first medal for me."

Related article: Russia Fast-Tracks Ukraine War Veterans Into Paralympic Sport – Investigation

Russia was banned from the 2018 Paralympics over a doping scandal, though some athletes competed under neutral colors.

Russia and Belarus were later banned from the 2022 Games following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, although they were allowed to compete as neutrals at the Summer Paralympics in Paris two years later.

Voronchikhina said she had been in Beijing preparing to compete in 2022 before Russia was suspended.

Later Saturday, three-time Paralympic gold medalist Bugaev earned the eighth Paralympic medal of his career after finishing third in the men's downhill standing event.

"It was a difficult medal, I would say, even one of the most difficult of my career," said the 28-year-old. "But I am very happy that I can represent my country again."

He added that competing without restrictions was meaningful, recalling previous Games when Russian athletes competed under modified flag colors.

"We're just happy that we can compete here on equal terms," Bugaev said. "And even more so to bring home a medal so that the flag can fly."

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2026/03/07/russia-wins-first-winter-paralympic-medals-since-2014-a92151