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ISU Reinstates Russian and Belarusian Figure Skaters as Neutral Athletes

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Russian skater Elizaveta Tuktamysheva. **Jean-Pierre Clatot / AFP**

Russian and Belarusian figure skaters will be allowed to return to international competitions for the upcoming 2026–27 season under a strict neutral status, the International Skating Union (ISU) announced Tuesday.

Under the new guidelines, athletes from both countries will compete without their national flags, anthems or any other state symbols. The ISU said the restrictions could be eased in the future if it "is satisfied that no safety or integrity issues arise."

A decision regarding the return of Russian and Belarusian judges and officials to international events will be deferred until after the 2026–27 season concludes.

The ISU said it is acting on recommendations from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which invited three figure skaters from Russia and Belarus to compete as neutrals at the 2026 Winter Games.

To qualify for international readmission, athletes must meet strict criteria, including passing background checks to verify they have no ties to their respective militaries or security services and have not publicly supported the war in Ukraine.

“The person concerned shall be given the opportunity to be heard, and a decision to withhold eligibility may be appealed,” the ISU statement read. These athletes will be permitted to form a “neutral team” to participate in group and relay events, it added.

The ISU had banned Russian and Belarusian athletes following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Russia has been under various Olympic restrictions since 2016, initially over a state-sponsored doping program. Russian athletes competed under the Olympic flag in 2018 and under the banner of the Russian Olympic Committee in Tokyo in 2021 and Beijing in 2022.

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