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IOC Provisionally Lifts Ban on Russian Olympic Committee, Athletes to Return to International Competitions

By Reuters

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Mikhail Degtyarev, President of the Russian Olympic Committee. **Artyom Pryakhin / Roscongress**

The International Olympic Committee provisionally lifted its suspension of the Russian Olympic Committee on Tuesday, marking a significant step towards Russia's reintegration into the Olympic fold ahead of the Los Angeles 2028 Games.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the ROC was suspended in October 2023 for recognizing regional Olympic councils in Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine — Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia.

The IOC said its executive board had lifted that suspension but had not decided yet on whether Russia could display its flag, colors or have its anthem played at the Games.

"We made it clear that all athletes had the possibility to compete at the Olympic Games. This

is what this decision speaks to. It allows Russian athletes to take part in sports competitions. We thought it was really important for athletes to have that possibility," IOC president Kirsty Coventry told a press conference.

"It was very clear when we strengthened our neutrality bylaw that selection would not be based only on sports performance, but also ability to serve as role models," she said, insisting the IOC would continue to closely monitor Russia.

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Russian Sports Minister Mikhail Degtyarev said the IOC's decision should clear the way for Russian athletes to make a full return to the international sporting stage.

"Our country's return to the Olympic family is a green light for international federations to reinstate all our athletes," Degtyarev said.

Russian athletes competed as neutrals at the 2024 Paris Olympics and at the 2026 Milano Cortina Winter Games.

"The decision was taken following a thorough analysis by the IOC's Legal Affairs Commission, considering that the ROC [Russian Olympic Committee] no longer includes as its members any regional sports organizations in territories falling under the jurisdiction of the National Olympic Committee (NOC) of Ukraine," the IOC said in a statement.

The IOC had said in 2023 that Russia recognizing regional Olympic councils in occupied parts of Ukraine violated the Olympic Charter and the territorial integrity of Ukraine's Olympic Committee.

On Tuesday it said: "The ROC confirmed that it does not, and will not, conduct any activities in these territories. The IOC EB will continue to closely monitor the situation relating to any ROC activities in those territories, and reserves the right to take any further measures if deemed necessary."

Doping scandals

In addition to Russia being ostracized over its invasion of Ukraine, its athletes' return to competition comes against the backdrop of one of the most damaging doping scandals in Olympic history.

The country has been under scrutiny since a 2015 World Anti-Doping Agency-commissioned report found evidence of systematic doping in Russian athletics, followed by findings that a state-sponsored cover-up operated around the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics.

Russia was barred from competing under its flag at several subsequent Games, with many athletes admitted only as neutrals, and WADA imposed a four-year ban in 2019 after Moscow was found to have manipulated laboratory data — a sanction later cut to two years by the Court of Arbitration for Sport. Russian officials have repeatedly denied the existence of a state-backed doping program.

"We ask to ensure that adequate testing is done on Russian athletes coming into the LA28 Games," Coventry said.

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