

Russian Sports Minister, Olympic Team Coach Speak Out on Sharapova Doping Scandal

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Russian Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko

Russian Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko has commented on the drug scandal involving tennis player Maria Sharapova that emerged Tuesday, claiming that athletes should have been aware of a ban introduced in January this year, the TASS news agency reported.

The Russian Sports Ministry had warned athletes that meldonium was included on the list of prohibited drugs, he said.

“Such cases must be examined because the athletes do not use it [meldonium] on their own initiative. Coaches, doctors, physiotherapists and federal managers should be held responsible for it. The worst thing is that the athlete is suffering,” Mutko said.

He added that more cases of use of the banned drug will be revealed in Russia, “to the delight of our ‘friends,’” TASS reported.

The coach of the Russian Olympic tennis team Vladimir Kamelzon said that he did not know whether Sharapova would be allowed to perform at the 2016 Summer Olympics after she confessed to using the prohibited medication, the Lenta.ru news website reported.

"The situation has received worldwide attention, and serious powers are to decide Sharapova's fate now. This news is a stab in the back for us. Sharapova is a symbol of Russia, and the doping situation will have a negative impact on her career," Kamelzon said in an interview to Lenta.ru.

"I am sure that Russia will fight for her to the last," he added, saying that there are lots of "subtle legal points" to the case, as the ban was introduced recently.

The first hearing in Sharapova's doping case will be held on March 23 in London, according to a tweet by Sky Sports reporter Paul Kelso. She is suspended from participating in tournaments starting from March 12.

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