

Russia's Sports Minister Says No Chance of Winter Games Doping Ban

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Russia's Sport Minister Pavel Kolobkov **Sergei Savostyanov / TASS**

Russian Sports Minister Pavel Kolobkov doesn't even "entertain" the possibility that Russian athletes could be disqualified from the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang over a doping scandal entering its third year.

Speaking with the state-run TASS news agency, Kolobkov [said](#) he hoped that some two dozen Russian athletes who competed in the Sochi Olympics would not have their medals rescinded over doping allegations, ahead of a decision on the matter by the International Olympic Committee expected in October.

"I would like to believe that the people who are responsible for these decisions will avoid being subjective in their assessments and will be guided by common sense, rely on irrefutable facts, and not give in to emotions," he said in the interview.

Kolobkov replaced Vitaly Mutko as sports minister last October after an independent

investigation named the ex-minister as a person of interest in what the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has called a "state-sponsored" doping program in Russia. Mutko was promoted to the post of deputy prime minister overseeing sport, tourism and youth policy.

Kolobkov said Russian authorities were investigating the doping allegations. "Around 80 athletes have been disqualified for doping, some coaches banned for life, the reform process of the national anti-doping agency is actively ongoing," he told TASS.

Asked whether he had been aware of doping violations in his own fencing career, Kolobkov said performance-enhancing drugs were "an exception" in the sport, but noted that during his career several foreign athletes had been caught doping, "not due to evil intent, but because of their own stupidity."

The minister expressed frustration that sanctions could be brought against Russian athletes after WADA declared the Russian anti-doping agency RUSADA non-compliant with its standards.

"Because RUSADA currently does not comply with the WADA code, certain sanctions can be applied both in relation to any competition held in our country and to Russian athletes — that seems strange to me," Kolobkov said.

WADA's board is expected to review the Russian anti-doping agency's compliance with its anti-doping code this November.

Kolobkov admitted that Russia could "theoretically" lose the right to host the 2018 FIFA World Cup. "There are clearly forces who are interested in bringing up the topic of sanctions," he said.

"I don't rule out that there will be more attacks on us, as organizers of the World Cup, but they're unlikely to lead to anything."

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