

Russian athletes barred from Paralympic Games

Andrea Peters
25 August 2016

Russia will not be allowed to compete in the Paralympic Games set to commence in Rio de Janeiro on September 7, due to allegations of state-sponsored doping. The decision by the Court of Arbitration of Sport (CAS) to bar all of the country's disabled athletes from participating in the world competition upholds a ban on the Russian team announced by the International Paralympics Committee (IPC) in early August. Describing the IPC's unanimous ruling to be "proportionate," the CAS insisted that Russia, which had appealed the action, "did not file any evidence contradicting the facts."

Russian paralympians have also been stripped of any individual right to appeal, such that they have no ability to prove their innocence of the collective charges leveled against them. In addition, authorities have made clear that the country's 2014 victories at the Sochi Olympics and Paralympics are also under investigation.

This week's move by the CAS is at odds with the decision by the Executive Board of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in July regarding Russia's Olympic athletes. At that time, authorities stopped short of banning the Russian team altogether—a move the head of the IOC described as the "nuclear option"—and allowed individuals to compete on a case-by-case basis, as determined by governing bodies in their individual sports. That action by the IOC garnered widespread condemnation in the press as insufficiently punitive towards Russia.

The doping accusations leveled against the Russian Olympic and Paralympic teams are based on a July report commissioned by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), which claims to have uncovered evidence of an elaborate system of performance-enhancing drug use and its cover-up involving the highest levels of the Russian state. The evidence, which

largely revolves around the claims of Dr. Grigory Rodchenkov, the former head of one of WADA's laboratories in Moscow, has not been released or subjected to public scrutiny.

Even if the allegations are true, which is certainly possible given the history of the Olympics and the immense political and financial gains associated with medals, there is no indication that every Russian sportsman or woman is implicated, making the decision of the CAS to target the country's entire Paralympic team particularly vindictive. According to Russian news reports, the CAS ruling has shattered the lifelong dreams of many athletes, whose conditions are deteriorating at such a pace that they are unlikely to be able to participate in any future Paralympics.

Russian authorities responded to the news with denunciations of the court's decision as politically motivated and heartless. "One cannot imagine a greater crime and cynicism," declared Mikhail Mamiashvili, the head of Russia's Sports Federation. "It is an inhumane act," he added.

Vladimir Lukin, president of the country's Paralympic Committee, stated, "This whole situation has gone so far that now sports is not peaceful, but a cold war and an iron curtain." The Kremlin has not issued any comment.

Lukin's deputy, Pavel Rozhkov, said that the organization would continue exploring legal avenues to challenge and overturn the CAS's decision. Individual athletes have also indicated they are pursuing their cases. According to Rozhkov, team members have not stopped training. However, there is little chance that the ban will be overruled, as the CAS, which is the highest court of world sports, and the IPC, have left no means for appeal and it would take other international legal bodies years to review the case.

Russian press outlets have suggested that the CAS's actions were partly motivated by a desire to remove Russian competitors from the field. The country came in fourth in total medals in the 2016 Olympics, despite the fact that over 100 of its athletes were barred from participating. In 2014, Russia's Paralympic team brought home 80 medals, nearly 40 percent of the total awarded.

When the IPC announced in August its plans to bar Russian participation in the Paralympics, the organization's president denounced the country for placing "medals over morals" and having a "thirst for glory." It insisted that Russia's antidoping program was "broken, corrupted and entirely compromised."

If these were the standards by which all countries were evaluated for participation, then there would be no Olympics or Paralympics. The games, while showcasing tremendous human accomplishments and physical feats, are simultaneously orgies of nationalism, profiteering, corruption and cutthroat competition in which the world's great powers, not least of all the United States, play a leading role. Both in the Olympics and in major athletics in general, there are countless instances of athletes, teams, sports authorities and politicians involved in doping, bribery, theft and much more in order to secure medals, world records and lucrative contracts.

The barring of Russian paralympians from the forthcoming games is yet another moment in the increasingly crazed and dangerous anti-Russian propaganda that has seized the media and the political establishment, particularly in the United States and Europe. The decision by the world's top sports authorities to target Russia comes alongside the escalation of tensions in eastern Europe, with the US-backed Ukrainian government initiating provocations against Russian-held Crimea. It also coincides with the McCarthyite anti-Russian witch hunt being carried by the campaign of Democratic presidential contender Hilary Clinton against Donald Trump.

Had Russia taken some sort of similar action targeting disabled athletes, the Kremlin would be the object of hysterical denunciations for persecuting a minority group that has been historically discriminated against and faces tremendous personal obstacles. The country's actions would be presented as the latest in a series of "human rights" crimes against which the

international community had to mobilize.

The demonization of Russia for state-sponsored doping is part of the ideological preparation for war, which the America ruling class is pursuing with reckless determination. The fact that hundreds of ordinary athletes have been indiscriminately set upon in this latest salvo against Russia is an expression of the readiness of the major powers to target not just the Russian government, but the population as a whole.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact