

IOC suspends Russian Olympic Committee



● GETTY IMAGES

BBC – The International Olympic Committee's executive board has suspended the Russian Olympic Committee "with immediate effect until further notice".

The move comes after the ROC recognised regional organisations from four Ukrainian territories illegally annexed by Russia since its full-scale invasion began in 2022.

The IOC said last week's recognition was "a breach of the Olympic Charter because it violates the territorial integrity of the National Olympic Committee of Ukraine".

The suspension means the ROC "is no longer entitled to operate as a National Olympic Committee" and "cannot receive any funding from the Olympic movement".

Olympic Councils from the regions of Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia had been recognised by the ROC.

The IOC added it would decide whether Russian athletes could compete as neutrals at Paris 2024 "at the appropriate time".

In response, the ROC called the suspension "another counterproductive decision with obvious political motivations".

The IOC did not initially sanction the ROC following the invasion, but Russia has been banned from competing as a nation in athletics since November 2015 after state-sponsored doping was uncovered.

Russia's doping suspension was lifted in March but the World Athletics Council ruled the nation would remain banned "for the foreseeable future" because of the war in Ukraine.

The IOC has been under consistent pressure to ban Russian and Belarusian athletes from competing even under a neutral flag since the invasion began.

But in March it told sporting federations they should allow athletes from those countries to compete as neutrals.

Ukraine has threatened to boycott next year's Games in Paris if a full ban on Russian and Belarusian athletes is not upheld.

"This is an important decision," said Andriy Yermak, head of Ukraine's presidential office, who added that "sports cannot be out of politics" and accused Russia of using "athletes as propaganda".

Currently, IOC sanctions mean no international sporting events can be organised in the territory of either Russia or its ally Belarus, while the flags, national anthems or any other national symbol of both countries must not be used.

'Now is the moment', Kiani says of preparation for Paris



At her physical peak and without any injuries, she plans to compete as often as possible in the run up to Paris.



Iran's Nahid Kiani (blue) is seen in action against Canadian Skylar Park at the Taiyuan Grand Prix in China on October 10, 2023. ● WORLD TAEKWONDO

WORLD TAEKWONDO – Life can change in an instant – and so can taekwondo. Nahid Kiani knows this all too well.

Twice, the Iranian was within a split second of clinching a gold medal victory at the Taiyuan Grand Prix. Twice, fortune shifted. The finals of the women's -57kg matched pitted world champion Kiani against popular Canadian Skylar Park, a third-generation taekwondoist.

Round 1 saw both athletes deploying clean, powerful, long-range technique, and both hunting the head. But the Iranian was clearly dominant and took the round.

In round 2, Park aggressed with a body kick and a head kick going five up, but after an IVR, it was the Iranian who once again drew

ahead. If she could maintain that lead, the match – and the gold – would be hers under the "best of three" system.

But Park landed a game changer in the final second, taking the game to the third.

Round 3 was fierce action – powerful kicks, falls – but the Iranian, yet again, took the lead. Park's dad/coach requested an IVR. Granted – but the board was still 7-5 to the Iranian. Six seconds left. Park drove Kiani off the mats. Score: 7-6 to the Iranian.

Less than one second remained. The order to fight was given and Park attacked immediately – landing to the body for a one-point win.

Kiani dropped to her knees in dismay. Finishes don't get more dramatic than this.

A silver at this level of competition is a fine feat, but the 25-year-old Tehran native, speaking the day after the match, admitted her inner agony.

"Since yesterday, I have seen that moment running through my mind more than 100 times," Kiani said. "What could I have done to change the result?" Making things doubly dire was that Kiani had, in the past, generated game-changing, last-second moves herself.

"Taekwondo is a sport of the moment and I have won many matches like that, I have changed the result!" she said. "In the future, I will be more careful about the last moment."

Still, the future looks bright. Recent shifts in circumstances have lifted her fortunes in taekwondo.

Kiani has a long competitive background, having learned the ropes of international competition in both juniors and cadets, before graduating to the seniors.

She qualified for, and fought at both the 2019 Worlds in Manchester and the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. In both cases, she went home without a medal.

But things were changing. Just prior to Tokyo, Kiani had stepped up in weight, fighting at -57kg.

"I feel much better at this category," she said. "After the Tokyo Olympics I felt that medal belonged to me – I had to grab it."

Post-Tokyo, new leadership came to the national team and Kiani got a new coach: Minoo Maddah.

"She helped me mentally a lot," Kiani said. "She helped me to believe in myself and

showed me that you can reach everything."

The combination of ingredients proved to be the secret sauce. Suddenly, the also-ran was bringing home precious medal in elite-level competition.

Kiani has won (deep breath): Gold at the 2022 Chuncheon Asian Championships; gold at the 2023 Baku World Championships; silver at the 2023 Roma Grand Prix; gold at the Chengdu 2021 Summer World University Games; and silver at the 2023 Taiyuan Grand Prix.

In short: She is one of the top players in the women's division. Kiani's moment is now.

She attributes her current attitude and character to the long time she spent in the medal wilderness.

"I never give up," she said.

"Sometimes I lose, but I never get tired, I come back as strong as possible."

At her physical peak and without any injuries, she plans to compete as often as possible in the run up to Paris. There, she has two connected aims: To win gold, and to make her parents proud.

In fact, her career is due to her mother. Kiani's journey in the sport started when her mother bought her a taekwondo uniform when she was eight.

Fast forward to today, and the 25-year-old has no regrets about the life choices that purchase initiated.

"Since I started to do taekwondo, I have continued it and many things have happened and many doors have opened to me – many possibilities," she said. "Anything can happen."

Qatar World Cup construction workers sue US firm for labor trafficking



● KAI PFAFFENBACH/REUTERS

REUTERS – Dozens of Filipino workers who helped build stadiums that hosted the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar filed a lawsuit on Thursday claiming U.S. construction firm Jacobs Solutions Inc subjected them to dangerous and inhumane conditions.

The nearly 40 plaintiffs in a complaint filed in federal court in Denver, Colorado, said Jacobs and several subsidiaries that oversaw the construction projects forced workers to live in cramped, dirty barracks and work up to 72 hours straight in blistering heat without food and water.

The plaintiffs also claim they were not paid all of their wages and had their

passports confiscated, barring them from finding new jobs or returning home to the Philippines.

Dallas, Texas-based Jacobs did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Qatar has faced intense criticism from human rights groups over its treatment of migrant workers, who along with other foreigners comprise the bulk of the country's population.

The scrutiny intensified in the years leading up to the 2022 World Cup, when hundreds of workers were reportedly killed and thousands injured during construction projects.

The government of Qatar has said that far fewer

workers were killed or injured, and in 2020 raised the country's minimum wage and applied it to foreign workers for the first time.

The plaintiffs in Thursday's lawsuit claim Jacobs knew or should have known about human rights abuses in Qatar and chose to knowingly exploit workers.

Jacobs and its subsidiaries are accused of violating a U.S. law that prohibits trafficked or forced labor even when the alleged conduct occurs outside the United States. The plaintiffs also accused Jacobs of negligence and unjust enrichment, among other claims. They are seeking unspecified damages.