Lithuanian Swimming Team Suffers a Huge Blow from World Aquatics

LTU Aquatics, the governing body of Lithuanian water sports, received an official letter from the World Aquatics stating that one member of the Lithuanian team, which secured a spot in the 4x200m freestyle relay for the Olympics, will not be able to swim in Paris due to strict Olympic quotas.

"This is absurdly unjust, a violation of Olympic and sports principles, and a huge blow to the entire swimming world, not just Lithuania," said Saulius Binevičius, president of LTU Aquatics.

World Aquatics stated: "We commend Lithuania’s achievement in qualifying for the Men’s 4x200m Freestyle Relay in Paris 2024 and for being the champion in this event at the recent European Aquatics Championships 2024. This milestone reflects a momentous opportunity for Lithuania to showcase its competitive edge at the forthcoming Olympic Games in Paris, France.

However, we must respectfully inform you that the established quota places and the Qualification System for the Olympic Games Paris 2024 do not provide World Aquatics any flexibility. As outlined in the Qualification System, the consideration for offering additional Relay-Only athlete quota places to the NOC was to help the NOC solely for the purpose of enabling the relay team to participate in the relevant event, provided that the NOC does not have a sufficient number of qualified athletes with OQTs and invited athletes through OCT invitations. This was the guiding principle for World Aquatics’ considerations. Given that the rules and quotas are designed to ensure fairness and consistency for all participating NOCs, we are obligated to comply with these regulations without exception."

The Lithuanian 4x200m freestyle relay team earned the right to compete in Paris after an impressive swim at the World Aquatic Championships in Doha in February. The European Championships, where Lithuania won gold, determined who would represent Lithuania in this event at the Olympics. LTU Aquatics allocated significant financial and human resources for preparation. However, in early July, World Aquatics indicated that one of the freestyle swimmers would not be going to the Olympics due to quotas. His place must be taken by another swimmer who is with the OQT. Of all the Lithuanian freestyle swimmers, only Danas Rapšys has done so. This means that one of the two swimmers who qualified in another swimming style—breaststroke—Andrius Šidlauskas, will have to participate in the relay.

LTU Aquatics asked World Aquatics to allow the strongest team composition to compete at the Olympics, considering the Olympic and sports principles. However, the global water sports organization said no.

"This is a very unpleasant surprise. Four swimmers trained all season, competed for a place in the team that should swim at the Olympics, and now they learned that one of them will not be able to do so, despite having earned the right. It is sad for the young athletes who experienced such a blow even after becoming European champions. They were contenders for the Olympic final. This would have meant a lot for Lithuanian sports. Now, hoping for any better result when three athletes swim freestyle and one trains only in breaststroke is simply naive and unprofessional. I am uncomfortable having to swim in a relay I am not related to. Of course, I will do my best, but it is absurd because conditions should be the same for all participants. The saddest thing is that all of Lithuania's hopes of achieving the best historical result in the relay are shattered even before the start," says Šidlauskas.

Lithuania's best swimmer, Danas Rapšys, who met the Olympic standard in three events, does not hide his disappointment.

"It is sad that, having the strongest relay lineup in our swimming history, we will not be able to utilize it at the Olympic Games. I saw with my own eyes how hard my teammates worked to showcase their abilities and to earn the right to compete at the Olympics. And now, despite having earned that right, we will not be able to reveal our full potential or achieve the best result. Is that the essence of the Olympic spirit?" says Rapšys.

Saulius Binevičius, who has participated in three Olympics, states that Lithuania, along with several other teams, is shocked by this injustice.

"I have never encountered such a violation of sports principles. Our team is deeply unsettled because we were prepared to achieve our highest goals at the Olympic Games. The well-being of our athletes is critical, as it is clear that we will not be allowed to pursue those goals. Kristupas Trepočka, who’s progress recently increased dramatically and who became the European Junior Champion just a few days ago, had to be told that the Olympic doors are being slammed in his face this year. Can you imagine how he feels? We will appeal to all countries that have faced the same fate, and we are considering the possibility of appealing to the Court of Arbitration for Sport," says the head of LTU Aquatics.