

Former Judo Coach Critiques Putin

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Putin throwing down an unidentified judo black belt at a new sports complex Wednesday in St. Petersburg. **Alexei Druzhinin**

ST. PETERSBURG — Prime Minister Vladimir Putin was given tips on pushing his hips forward and how to use his left hand by his long-time judo coach during a sparring session on Wednesday.

In a televised display, the black-belt prime minister was treated to advice from his former trainer, who looked on as Putin grappled with a number of opponents before reporters at the inauguration of a sports complex in his hometown of St. Petersburg.

"Move your hips forward," said Anatoly Rakhlin, who coached Putin for 15 years in judo and sambo, a martial art that is part of the training for members of Russia's security forces.

"I watched your technique today ... but your left hand needs more work," he told him.

Speaking to reporters, however, Rakhlin was less hard on the 58-year-old former KGB agent.

"Overall Vladimir Vladimirovich has an excellent technique. God grant that everyone his age

be able to do the same thing," Rakhlin said.

Putin, bare-chested under his judo uniform, asked Sports, Tourism and Youth Politics Minister Vitaly Mutko about the country's progress in getting sambo approved as an Olympic sport.

"They are not letting us in. It's politics," Mutko told Putin, who urged him to push the bid.

The prime minister cultivates an image as a man of action. This year, he has fired darts from a crossbow at a whale from a dinghy in choppy waters, flown a firefighting jet above raging wildfires and tagged a polar bear on an Arctic expedition.

These stunts, as well as a 10-day drive across Siberia, were seen by some analysts as early campaigning for the 2012 presidential election.

Putin, who was president from 2000 to 2008, has not ruled out making another bid for the presidency.

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