

'Unruly' Hockey Team Makes It Home

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Players with the victorious Russian national junior ice hockey team arriving at Sheremetyevo Airport on Saturday. **Sergei Karpukhin**

Russia's junior hockey team arrived in Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport on Saturday, making it home on the second try after being turned back from their flight late Wednesday for “unruly behavior” that followed their surprise world championship win.

The 32-member team departed Friday from Buffalo Niagara International Airport, where it arrived with a police escort, and was greeted in Sheremetyevo by a crowd of some 250 enthusiastic fans, Itar-Tass [said](#).

"I feel better," forward Yevgeny Kuznetsov repeated with a smile before boarding Friday morning.

His teammates were in an upbeat mood and eager to finally return home, signing autographs, posing for pictures with curious onlookers, and flashing their gold medals in the departure hall. A few also playfully used their cell phones to take pictures of a television camerawoman as she was videotaping them.

"[We're] very happy," said Mikhail Zislis, the team's media officer. "Everybody is waiting for us in Russia."

Airport spokesman C. Douglas Hartmayer said he was informed of no trouble regarding the Russian travelers.

Russia overcame a three-goal deficit in the third period to stun Canada 5-3 in the gold-medal game at the World Junior Hockey Championship on Wednesday. It was the country's first gold medal since 2003.

An hour and a half after the upset win, several Russian coaches and trainers came on the ice — one holding a bottle of Crown Royal Canadian whisky and others sipping from paper cups — to pose for pictures in front of the scoreboard that had been lowered to ice level after the game.

Some five hours after the victory, the Russians arrived at the airport, but were turned back by the flight crew for what a Delta Air Lines official described as "unruly behavior."

Airport police officer James Bittner said Friday that the team was rowdy upon arriving for check in but had calmed down when passing through security. Bittner said players once again became rowdy upon boarding the plane.

Bittner also said one player had vomited and was treated by medical officials at the airport before being cleared to board the flight.

Canadian Press video shows elated players whooping it up at a hotel bar following their victory.

The team's bus driver, Curtis Hall, told The Buffalo News that the Russians "were definitely intoxicated," and some players were so drunk they had to be carried onto the bus before leaving for the airport.

Zislis has disputed the reports, saying players were not intoxicated and that they drank only champagne in the locker room following the victory. He accused Delta of overreacting for forcing the team off the plane. Zislis also said he was unaware of any player vomiting.

A statement posted on the Russian Hockey Federation web site said the team arrived home a day late because it was tardy getting to the airport.

"After the success in the final, the guys were overwhelmed by emotion," federation executive director Valery Fesyuk said in the statement. "Therefore, gathering them took a little more time, and the team arrived at the airport with a delay."

(AP, MT)

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