

Putin Hits the Ice in Hockey Skates

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Prime Minister Vladimir Putin controlling the puck during a training session for young ice hockey players Friday. **Alexei Nikolsky**

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin took to the ice in front of television cameras late Friday as he joined a training session with teenage hockey players.

Putin, wearing a red helmet and a red and blue uniform with the number 11 and his name on the back, joined the White Bears and another team named Forward at Moscow's Luzhniki stadium for a 40-minute session as they prepared for the final of the national Golden Puck junior hockey championship Saturday.

"It's an exciting and energetic sport," said Putin, 58, as he left the stadium, perspiring and breathing heavily. "It reminds me of mountain skiing, it's less traumatic than soccer."

Putin, who has hinted that he may run for the presidency in the March election, regularly seeks to portray his physical fitness. A black belt in judo, he has been shown bare-chested on horseback and swimming butterfly across a Siberian river. A keen skier, the prime minister has been at the forefront of Russia's preparations to stage the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.

Putin told reporters Friday that he only started learning how to skate two months ago after last trying to skate in his youth — and not liking it. "My legs went apart at once, and I decided this sport was not for me," he said. "But now I like it very much."

(Reuters, Bloomberg, MT)

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