

In the Spotlight

By [Anna Malpas](#)

May 19, 2011



This week, Russia's Alexei Vorobyov only came in 16th place in the Eurovision song contest, prompting grumpy comments that Russia was represented by a "gopnik," or yob, who swore live on television.

Vorobyov was picked by Channel One as a safe pair of hands for the contest, instead of putting it up to public vote, in a clear sign that Russia just wanted to put in a respectable presence rather than have to repaint Olimpiisky again. His placing was seen as a failure in Russia, even if it was better than "king of pop" Filipp Kirkorov's 17th place in 1995, when Russia was still getting to grips with europop.

Vorobyov comes from the blue-collar town of Tula, and his site says his father is a security guard. He won a talent show on the Rossia channel called "The Secret of Your Success," skated in the celebrity show "Ice and Fire" with Olympic champion Tatyana Navka and went on Channel One's "Cruel Games," one of those shows where famous people have to try not to fall into the water while climbing over foam rubber obstacles.

Vorobyov blamed politics for his placing in a message on his web site, saying "I realized that

this year would be very hard because Russia has no friends in Europe today, but I believed that I could break through this with a high quality performance. But politics turned out to be stronger than music."

Oddly enough, Azerbaijan won, despite hardly having a spotless political reputation.

When Vorobyov got through his semifinal, he was shown on television in a white wife-beater vest, waving a flag and shouting audibly: "This is Russia, [expletive]. Come here, [expletive]. Look in my eyes, [expletive]." He said later he did not realize the microphone was switched on. "Any normal Russian person when he is filled with emotions can let words out," he told Izvestia.

Admittedly, this would not have offended most of the audience and is unlikely to have influenced the result outside the ex-Soviet Union. But it was not going to win him fans in Russia, where the word may be heard on every street corner but is still taboo on television.

"Alexei Vorobyov hardly embodied aristocratic manners and education," music critic Boris Barabanov wrote in Kommersant. "Live on air after the semifinal he showed himself in the image of a jubilant gopnik."

Vedomosti compared Vorobyov to a Russian footballer, who let the nation down by swearing into a camera while playing in an international match, saying he had gone further. "He pronounced several times a word of five letters starting with the second letter of the Russian alphabet," it wrote cryptically. "What's more he combined it with the name of his own country. It came across, to put it mildly, as not very patriotic."

"His swearing and inability to behave significantly lowered his chances of getting a decent place," Vedomosti wrote.

Izvestia laid into him for another gaffe — saying his decision to wish the audience a happy Victory Day in the semifinal was somewhat inappropriate, since the contest was being held in Germany.

Russian celebrities hurried to distance themselves from Vorobyov with quips about swearing. "All the same, the Russian proverb is right, don't say '[expletive]' before your eggs are hatched," voluptuous television host Anfisa Chekhova wrote on Twitter.

"You mustn't be in a hurry to say '[expletive] you,'" wrote pop producer Iosif Prigozhin (whose wife and protege Valeriya failed to get through the Russia heat in 2009). "Get it done first, and then celebrate."

"I think this will be the most memorable hit from Vorobyov, representing our cultured country," pop singer Sergei Lazarev (who failed to win the Russia heat in 2008) commented acidly. "Lyokha, stick to singing. Don't talk!"

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/05/19/in-the-spotlight-7086-a7086>