

Victorious, Kalach Heads to Oslo

By [Jekaterina Tchekourda](#)

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The days-long journey did not dampen the Kalach team's enthusiasm. **Vladimir Filonov**

Eight happy, proud boys in green and black posed for a picture at the CSKA football stadium, holding up a gigantic voucher that guaranteed them a trip to the Norwegian capital, Oslo.

The boys, all from the Kalacheyevskaya Children's Home in the Voronezh region, also known as Kalach, had just won the Russian qualifying competition for the MTG United for Peace football cup.

The wet and cold weather did not dampen the atmosphere for the children, whose excitement was tangible as they kicked a ball around in shiny new football kits supplied by sponsors.

"It took us one day to get to the train, and then we were on the train for another day," said Sergei Zhovtya, the 14-year-old captain of Kalach, while holding a huge shiny trophy in one hand and a goodie bag with gifts in the other. "We are so happy we won today. This is the best part of the whole event. We trained for five hours per day before we came to compete in Moscow, and we will train even harder before going to Norway."

Kalacheyskaya had placed third in the competition the year before.

In total, 12 teams from Russian children's homes took part in the two-day final that took place earlier this month to decide who would go to the final in Oslo between Oct. 7 and 10. The MTG United for Peace cup was set up to build bridges between children of different nationalities.

Participants put on halftime entertainment for those who came to watch, and CSKA stars like Alexei Berezutsky and coach Leonid Slutsky were on hand to congratulate the winners.

Finding 12 teams among the hundreds of Russian children's homes was not easy.

"It was difficult to find enough participants," said Maria Kuzminova, president of Share Care, the charity that organized the event, as she hurried across the pitch.

"We needed to find orphanages that have their own football teams, which is rare enough, but in addition, according to the official guidelines, all the players had to be aged between 12 and 14."

There was also the matter of transport for Kalacheyskaya, one of a number of teams who traveled far and wide to get to the tournament. Other teams came from Moscow, Pskov, Voronezh, Ryazan, Ivanovo, Kaluga, Yaroslavl, Bryansk, Vologda and the Tula region.

Share Care is a respected charity that raises money for children's homes in need.

To anyone looking from afar, no one would have known that the children were from an orphanage — although at a tent with free food and drinks, many of the children grabbed handfuls of sweets and instant coffee sachets, stuffing them into their rucksacks and coat pockets, perhaps preparing for when there will be no free drinks, sponsored pizza or goodie bags.

Viasat Sport and CSKA were just two of the sponsors that Kuzminova found so that the tournament could take place.

"We are very happy to be here and to be able to help," said Pavel Zazelensky from another sponsor Petropavlovskoe Ltd., which provided drinks for the children.

"When I was a child, I could only have dreamed about an event like this one — and I was just a normal kid and not an orphan. I can only anticipate the emotions that these kids are going through right now. All eyes and all attention is on them today."

For more on the charity, see sharecare.ru or call +7 (905) 530-0000.

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