

Putin Approves Rosneft CSKA Buy

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Healthy living proponent Putin, 2nd right, received coaching before training with the Hockey Legends club Friday. **Alexei Nikolsky**

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said Friday that he had encouraged Russia's biggest oil firm Rosneft to take over the country's legendary ice hockey club CSKA, in a move likely to please sports fans ahead of the election.

Putin, who will seek his third term as president in the March 2012 poll and is campaigning for his United Russia party ahead of a parliamentary vote on Dec. 4, donned ice hockey skates to train with former CSKA stars.

Putin said CSKA president Vyacheslav Tikhonov, a veteran Soviet national team coach, had approached him recently asking him to help the club, which has won 32 championships in the 46-year history of the Soviet ice hockey league.

"We started looking around, brought in our energy firms, agreed with Rosneft that they must, no, may support the ice hockey club," Putin told a group of government officials and sports

executives at the CSKA training base.

Putin said Rosneft was ready to invest "hundreds of millions of dollars" in CSKA.

Putin, 59, a black belt in judo, says he wants to promote sport and healthy lifestyles among ordinary Russians and is known for "action man" publicity stunts that have become more frequent in the run-up to the elections.

He has recently been coached in ice hockey by former CSKA star Alexei Kasatonov.

Putin said the Defense Ministry, the founder and former owner of CSKA, was no longer able to support the club, whose annual budget is \$70 million, and warned of an exodus of talented players abroad.

"Otherwise they will not be competitive compared with the NHL [North America's hockey league], and all the leading players will flee. We should be realistic, we cannot close the border and keep people on a leash," he said.

Russia's cash-rich energy majors are heavily involved in sports sponsorship, with Rosneft's rival LUKoil sponsoring soccer club Spartak and Gazprom owning St. Petersburg ice hockey club SCA.

Russia won the right to stage the 2016 world ice hockey championship this year, with Moscow and St. Petersburg picked as host cities. Putin has also helped Russia land the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi and the 2018 football World Cup.

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