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New Inquiry Questions Lokomotiv Crash's Cause

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A new investigation into the plane crash that wiped out Yaroslavl's elite Lokomotiv hockey team in September contradicts the official account, arguing that mechanical failure — not pilot error — caused the crash in which 44 died, Izvestia reported Tuesday.

The investigation, carried out by flight experts on behalf of relatives of some of the victims, concluded that the Yak-42 airplane rolled inexplicably after takeoff and that power to the plane's engines was reduced at a critical moment, causing it to stall.

The official version, released by the Interstate Aviation Committee earlier this month, states that one of the pilots — possibly under the influence of a sedative — accidentally pressed the brakes as the plane raced down the runway, preventing it from picking up enough speed for a proper takeoff.

But pilot error doesn't explain why the plane fell back to earth after briefly becoming airborne, the authors of the new report say. They also noted that investigators failed to explain why the plane's left wing collided with the ground first and why the engines

powered down for six seconds during takeoff.

The new report, which will be officially released Wednesday, repeats the Interstate Aviation Committee's criticism of a pilot retraining program run by Yak-Service, the plane's owner, which may have caused the pilots to confuse the Yak-42's brakes with footrests.

Lokomotiv was on its way to its regular season opener in Minsk when their charter plane crashed shortly after takeoff near Yaroslavl. The team's main roster — including several former NHL players — head coach Brad McCrimmon and most of the coaching staff were killed. Only flight mechanic Alexander Sizov survived.

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