

Putin Congratulates New Hockey World Champions

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The Russian team beat out Slovakia 6:2 to become the new hockey world champion.

Russia's hockey team blasted its way past Slovakia's goalkeeper in the 2012 IIHF World Championships to earn a 6:2 victory and a telephone call from President Vladimir Putin, who was eager to heap praise on the team.

Russia's victory in the match with Slovakia Sunday closed its undefeated performance in the championship, with Russia beating out defending champion and home team Finland to become the new world champion in hockey.

In line with tradition, the team transformed the victory cup into a vessel for champagne in locker-room celebrations.

"Today's game is a victory that makes me very happy," head trainer Zinetulla Bilyaletdinov said, Channel One reported. "I am very happy not only for myself and the guys, but for our country, that we won, and our country is once again in the forefront," he said.

In response to a journalist's query, "To whom do you dedicate your victory?" Russia player Yevgeniy Malkin answered "Of course to Lokomotiv, we remember them, the guys who are regrettably not with us. And of course, the whole country."

A September airline accident killed the entire Lokomotiv team, evoking strong emotions throughout the world of hockey.

President Vladimir Putin congratulated team trainer Bilyaletdinov by telephone. "Vladimir Putin sent congratulations to all players of our team through the head trainer, as well as all those who made this series of brilliant victories possible," a Kremlin spokesman told Interfax..

The spokesman said that when Bilyaletdinov was seen on television speaking on the phone before the Russian anthem was played, he was speaking with Putin.

The Kremlin also said Putin watched the final match from beginning to end, as he did most of Russia's games in the championship.

Russian fans celebrated the victory through the night in Helsinki, waving the Russian tricolor flag and team symbols, as did thousands of fans in cities throughout Russia.

This was Russia's third championship title since 2008.

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