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Putin Awarded Eighth Dan by International Judo Body

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Putin attending a judo training session at the Top Athletic School in his native St. Petersburg in December 2009. **Alexei Druzhinin**

President Vladimir Putin, who possesses a black belt in judo, has been awarded the eighth dan, one of the sport's highest honors, by the International Judo Federation.

"Being the Honorary President of the IJF, an Emeritus and recognized judoka, and having the stature of the Head of State of a pre-eminent country, Vladimir Putin is the perfect ambassador for our sport," IJF president Marius Vizer said in a letter.

Putin, who celebrated his 60th birthday Sunday, was named the IJF's honorary president in 2008.

"It is a great honor for our international federation, as well as for the entire judo community, to count among us a very high personality of his reputation and standing," Vizer said.

"President Putin represents a high expression of the judo values in the world," he said in the

letter, released Wednesday.

Putin is the first Russian to be awarded the eighth dan, joining a handful of judo fighters in the world who have achieved such status.

Russia's Alexander Mikhailin, who has won three world heavyweight titles and also claimed the silver medal at the 2012 London Olympics, has a sixth dan.

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