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Putin Mourns Judo Coach He Considered 'Mentor'

By The Moscow Times

August 11, 2013



President Vladimir Putin paying his respects to his former judo trainer Anatoly Rakhlin in St. Petersburg on Friday. **Mikhail Klimentyev**

ST. PETERSBURG — President Vladimir Putin attended a service Friday in memory of his former judo coach, a man he has credited as his "mentor" during his youth.

Anatoly Rakhlin, who once said he was Putin's "second father," died Wednesday at the age of 75, reportedly after a long illness.

In a telegram of condolence posted on the presidential website Wednesday, Putin said that he was deeply saddened by Rakhlin's death and that it represented "a big, irreplaceable loss for all of us."

Rakhlin was a "real teacher and attentive mentor both in sports and in life," Putin said.

Putin laid flowers at Rakhlin's grave in St. Petersburg and spent some time standing next

to his former coach's coffin with his head bowed. He also spoke to Rakhlin's widow and with his former sparring partners.

A monument could be erected in St. Petersburg in Rakhlin's memory, a Putin ally who was another of the coach's former students said Friday.

"We're now thinking about how to immortalize his memory. Maybe there'll be a monument or something else," said State Duma Deputy Vasily Shestakov, who as a young man sparred with Putin under Rakhlin's tutelage.

Rakhlin trained Putin for 15 years, beginning when the future KGB colonel and Russian leader was 13. Their bond was so tight that Rakhlin was called by the Kremlin for a private lunch with the president the day after his inauguration in 2000, according to a profile of Putin in Vanity Fair published that year.

In a 50-year-career, Rakhlin trained several leading figures in the Russian elite, including billionaire businessman Arkady Rotenberg and Putin's political ally Shestakov, both of whom were sparring partners of the president. At the time of his death, Rakhlin ran a youth sports academy in St. Petersburg.

Putin presented Rakhlin with a "medal of honor" for his achievements in Russian judo on the coach's 75th birthday last May.

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