

Hey Volodya, Here's a Gold Medal for Russia

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The Russian figure skating team taking to the podium after winning gold in the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. **Brian Snyder**

SOCHI — Outside the Iceberg Skating Palace, urologist Andrei Severyukhin was as certain about the winner of the team skating competition as he was about the colors of the Russian flag he had just had painted on his face.

"It would be unreal if we do not win gold tonight," Severyukhin said.

The first one for the host country came just as predicted, much to the delight of Severyukhin and his daughter, who joined their countrymen in a celebration as raucous as it gets in figure skating as Russia won the gold in the inaugural event.

President Vladimir Putin was on hand to celebrate the first gold of the Games he brought to Russia, hugging aging star Yevgeny Plushenko and his teammates and posing with them

for pictures. So were players of the Russian ice hockey team and other Olympians.

They stood and cheered as Plushenko showed he still had enough left for one last run, setting a modern-day record by medaling in his fourth Olympics at the age of 31. They cheered more as a star in the making in 15-year-old Yulia Lipnitskaya put on a dazzling display in the ladies free skating portion of the event.

And they stayed around to toast their new heroes one more time as they took a team victory lap around the arena.

"Ro-ss-ia, Ro-ss-ia," fans chanted, as a country that flopped in figure skating four years ago in Vancouver flexed its muscles before an adoring crowd that provided the perfect home ice advantage.

They were certain of victory, certain this would be the night Russia got the first payoff for the \$51 billion Putin spent to put on the Olympics in this aging Black Sea resort town.

"I think it is the resurrection of the old Soviet skate team," Philip Shustov of Moscow had said a few hours earlier. "We must win."

Two nights after an opening ceremony that generally received high marks and helped put the focus back on sports from the problems surrounding the games, boisterous fans greeted Plushenko with a roar and roared even louder when he completed a program that added to the lead Russia built on the first night of competition.

Watching her husband's performance from just off the ice, Yana Rudkovskaya unveiled a large banner with a picture of her and Plushenko, their heads together in a loving embrace.

"My heart is with you!" it read.

But if Plushenko was there to capture old glory, Lipnitskaya showed she is the future with a skate that thrilled the predominantly Russian audience as she won the women's portion of the team event in a rout.

So many flowers and dolls were thrown on the ice for both skaters that the 11 young girls charged with skating out to remove them could not keep up.

If the outcome was not quite the lock Severyukhin predicted, it was all but assured before the night even began. Lipnitskaya was dazzling in her performance, and all the Russian ice dancing team had to do to cinch the medal over second place Canada was to make it on the ice on time.

Yelena Ilinykh and Nikita Katsalapov did that and more, cementing the rout with a dance that got yet another standing ovation from the home crowd, forcing the girls picking up after them to work overtime once again.

Fans streaming into the gleaming new arena were in a festive mood, carrying small Russian flags and getting their faces painted. Figure skating was dominated by the old Soviet Union and Russia — winning 51 medals in all — but the country slipped in Vancouver, winning just two medals and no gold.

"They were the heroes from our childhood," said Yevgeny Vorobyev, an economist from Siberia now living in Moscow. "I am not an expert but we may take two more golds in figure skating."

Diana Hadgerestan, who was given tickets by her company to the Games, was hoping to see Russia win gold after watching the country pick up its first medal in speed skating earlier.

"It was my dream to come but it was so difficult," she said. "We hope our country wins a lot more of them now."

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