

Plushenko Hangs Up His Skates After Withdrawing From Olympics

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Plushenko announced his retirement on Thursday after suffering from yet another back injury. **Vladimir Pesnya**

SOCHI — Four-time Olympic medalist Yevgeny Plushenko announced his retirement from figure skating Thursday after withdrawing from the Sochi Olympics with a back injury.

The 31-year-old fell on a triple axel while warming up for his short program at the Iceberg Skating Palace, and after failing to skate it off informed the judges he would not be able to compete.

"I'm ending my career," he said. Of further competition, he said: "My age allows it, but 12 operations, that's too many."

Plushenko helped Russia win team gold last week, and felt well enough to continue despite the presence of the injury, his coach said.

The withdrawal causes extra heartache for Maxim Kovtun, Russia's 18-year-old skater who beat Plushenko in the Russian nationals in December but lost out on the country's one Olympic place to the Turin 2006 champion.

Had Plushenko withdrawn through a proven injury immediately after the team event on Sunday, Russia could have replaced him with Kovtun, but the deadline passed at 10 a.m. local time Monday.

"Any substitution should have been done on the night of the team event. And Kovtun was not ready," Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko said. It was not clear if Mutko meant that Kovtun had no desire to replace Plushenko, or if Kovtun was simply not available at such short notice.

Plushenko's coach Alexei Mishin said that the skater felt well enough to compete.

"He couldn't pull out of the individual competition because he felt fine. A substitution wouldn't have been fair play," Mishin said. "Such a replacement would be trickery ... he was obliged to skate on."

Plushenko, who also won the silver behind Evan Lysacek in Vancouver four years ago and a silver at the Salt Lake City games of 2002, had vowed to retire after Sochi, whatever the result.

He has had back trouble for years and needed an operation on a herniated disc in Israel last year after pulling out of the European championships midway through the competition. Plushenko recently counted a total of 12 operations on his back and troublesome knee ligaments.

Returning to the ice this season, Plushenko skipped the top-tier Grand Prix events and only appeared in a minor competition in Riga in November. The loss to Kovtun put his place at the Olympics in jeopardy, but he convinced Russian selectors of his fitness and form in a behind-closed-doors performance last month, taking Russia's only place in the men's singles.

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