

# Omnipresent Putin Keeps IOC 'Very Happy'

By [The Moscow Times](#)

February 17, 2014



President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev watching a cross-country skiing competition. **Mikhail Klimentyev**

SOCHI — President Vladimir Putin seems to be everywhere at the Sochi Olympics these days, whether it is the competition venues, team headquarters or even posing for pictures with sports fans and volunteers.

The leader's presence at Russia's first Winter Olympics was always going to be top news given the country's human rights record, its frosty ties with the U.S. and the controversial anti-gay propaganda law.

And with his official plane parked on a runway just a stone's throw from the venues and visible from the nearby streets, Putin is relishing the spotlight.

Putin has attended ice hockey, biathlon and figure skating events and as far as

the International Olympic Committee, or IOC, is concerned, his frequent appearances are doing the Games only good.

"He is clearly a big sports fan which adds to that [presence]," IOC spokesman Mark Adams told reporters on Monday. "It is good to have the support of the head of state of the country and we are very happy for his support."

Ever since Sochi was surprisingly awarded the Olympics in 2007 following a powerful address by Putin himself to IOC members at their session in Guatemala, the Games at the Black Sea resort have been viewed with suspicion.

Organizers had to build every venue from scratch and the announcement that total investment would exceed \$50 billion triggered further negative headlines.

Putin had personally overseen preparations, publicly sacked top officials and wooed the IOC during its inspection visits over the years.

For him, it seemed the Games were more important as a political and diplomatic tool than a purely sporting event.

Adams said he could only compare his presence in Sochi anecdotally with the London 2012 Games where both Queen Elizabeth and Prime Minister David Cameron put in appearances.

These were, however, far more infrequent than the Russian leader's.

So were Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper's at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, and Silvio Berlusconi, at the time Italian Prime Minister, was hardly to be seen at the 2006 Turin Winter Games.

"Putin is at the top. The Sochi Games are his Games," a senior Russian sports official told Reuters on condition of anonymity. "He is in complete control."

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