

Russia Record Narrow Victory Over Slovakia After Hockey Shootout

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russia beat Slovakia 1-0 in the shootout.

SOCHI — Russia's Ilya Kovalchuk overcame injury to score the winning goal in a shootout to squeeze his disjointed team past Slovakia 1-0 in the Olympic hockey tournament.

Russia finishes second in Group A behind the U.S., who pounded Slovenia 5-1 on Sunday, and will have to play an extra playoff round before the quarterfinals, barring a vast blowout either way in Canada-Finland later in the day.

Sunday's match continued a string of underwhelming showings by the host hockey team, with President Vladimir Putin looking on for the second game running. Russia's narrow win over Slovakia followed a 3-2 shootout loss to the U.S. on Saturday and, before that, a 5-2 win over outsider Slovenia that was also harder than expected.

The Slovaks, once tipped as a dark horse for a medal, ends the preliminaries with three

defeats.

The Russians outshot Slovakia 31-24 in regulation and enjoyed five power-plays, but were denied by some strong Slovak penalty-killing and lights-out goaltending by Jan Laco.

The Russian offense was briefly hobbled when Kovalchuk required treatment in the locker room for an apparent knee injury, but the ex-New Jersey Devils man returned to the ice early in the third.

The closest Russia came to scoring was when defenseman Yevgeny Medvedev's shot bounced off the crossbar and post at the start of the third period. Officials ruled no goal on video replay.

Overtime saw more heroics from Laco, who stopped five more shots, and some desperate Slovak defensive play as the Central Europeans ran down the clock.

In the shootout, Slovakia missed both its shots and Russia secured the win as Alexander Radulov and Kovalchuk both beat Laco.

Russia is searching for its first Olympic hockey title since the fall of the Soviet Union.

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