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Sochi Notebook: Medal-Flavored Champagne Anyone?

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SOCHI — After the official medals ceremony each night, Russian athletes tend to celebrate their victories in a narrow circle — but in accordance with a truly Caucasian tradition.

The Caucasus is known for its exuberant celebrations, with guests drinking wine from a bride's shoe at weddings or from a drinking-horn during other festivities.

The Olympics are no exception, and while Russian athletes are clearly trying to meet President Vladimir Putin's expectations, they have also gone out of their way to celebrate their victories properly.

That was evident at a closed party in the Bosco House in central Sochi, where Russian athletes who had just become Olympic champions had to take their medals off and dip them in a large bowl of champagne that they would then drink from.

"All the Olympic teams have similar traditions but we do that publicly in our house," said Timur Guguberidze, head of Bosco Sport.

Irina Rodnina, a former Olympic champion in figure skating, visited the party and said that all the victories in Russia had been celebrated this way.

But in Soviet times, she said, there was not enough champagne to fill a bowl, and medals were too big to be dipped in a glass of champagne.

"So we would just drink a glass of champagne," she said.

Not all of the athletes at the party were eager to put their medals in champagne, however.

Figure skater Maxim Trankov, who with his partner Tatyana Volosozhar got a gold medal, said he did not bring his medal because he was worried it might be damaged.

"So many people were asking us to show it and to touch it, we decided not to bring them to this party," he said, adding that he would not allow his medal to be placed in champagne anyway.

"My medal is holy for me now," said figure skater Ksenia Stolbova, who got a silver medal with her partner Fyodor Klimov.

"I have hidden it away in my room and will not allow anything like this to be done with it," she said.

Alexander Tretyakov, who won the gold in skeleton last weekend, agreed to submerge his medal in champagne and seemed to enjoy the moment.

And even those athletes who were too protective of their medals to risk tainting them with champagne enjoyed the champagne drinking ritual.

According to Stolbova, the champagne tasted much sweeter after having the medals placed in it.

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