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Vegan Bobsledder Celebrates Sochi Golds With Tea, Cake and Rest

By Gabrielle Tetrault-Farber

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Alexei Voyevoda, right, with Alexander Zubkov **Jae C. Hong**

Russia let out a satisfied sigh of relief Sunday after the closing ceremony of the Sochi Olympics, which, with the single tear of an animatronic bear, wrapped up a 17-day sporting spectacle for which the country had waited seven years.

For many athletes including Alexei Voyevoda, a Sochi native and double gold medal winner in bobsleigh, the void left by the end of the Winter Games will be filled by much-needed rest and recuperation.

"For some people, the Olympics are a form of entertainment like any other," Voyevoda, 33, said in a telephone interview Tuesday. "People watch the events, cheer for their team and then go home. For the athletes, it is a full-time job that requires lots of concentration. When our job is done, we just want to sleep and relax."

On Sunday, Voyevoda helped Russia win gold as a brakeman in a tight four-man bobsleigh race, finishing 0.09 seconds ahead of the Latvian silver medalists. He also helped Russia's flag bearer Alexander Zubkov win gold in the two-man bobsleigh event.

Now a four-time Olympic medalist in bobsleigh as well as a three-time world arm wrestling champion, Voyevoda views his most recent Olympic triumphs as part of his job, just another day at the office. He said he did not even feel the need to celebrate.

"People celebrate to feel positive emotions," he said. "I am already a happy person. I do not really need a celebration to have these good feelings."

But Voyevoda, who is vegan and does not drink, admitted that he and his family "drank tea and had some cake" to honor his two gold medals.

For athletes competing in multiple events like Voyevoda or 15-year-old figure skater Yulia Lipnitskaya, returning to a sense of normalcy after the Olympics involves recovering from the Games' condensed competition schedule.

"I am very tired," Voyevoda said. "The two-man and four-man bobsleigh competitions were less than one week apart. When we were not competing, we were training and preparing for the next race. I am glad I get to rest a bit now."

In an interview with The Moscow Times in January, Voyevoda said he was contemplating returning to arm wrestling, a discipline he had dominated before taking on bobsleigh, after the Sochi Games.

But Voyevoda's double gold medals could make him change his mind.

"Whether the Sochi Games mark the end of my bobsleigh career is a tough question," he said. "Our team is still good and we have shown that we can prevail against the toughest competitors. I know that I could keep going if I wanted."

Voyevoda's athletic versatility provides him with a smorgasbord of options in the post-Sochi world. But the hometown hero refuses to lock himself into a single discipline.

"My plans for the future are a secret. For now."

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