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Russian Hockey Federation Fined Over Canadian Anthem Incident

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Russia's Yegor Yakovlev (L) reacts with to his teammates after losing the Ice Hockey World Championship final game against Canada at the O2 arena in Prague, Czech Republic, May 17, 2015.

The Russian Hockey Federation was fined Monday over the national team snubbing Canada's victory celebrations after the world championship final.

The sport's governing body, the IIHF, said the Russian players deliberately left the ice before Canada's national anthem was played after a signal from captain Ilya Kovalchuk.

The Russian Federation had claimed its players had been confused after the rink-side gate was left open and took that as a signal to leave following the 6-1 loss in May in Prague.

But after studying video evidence, the IIHF said Kovalchuk gave an "unmistakable head gesture" as signal for teammates to skate off the ice early after collecting their silver medals. They did not stay to hear the Canadian anthem and watch the flags of the three medalist countries being raised.

"This was exceptional as no other team has ever left the ice before the IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship medal ceremony was completed," the Zurich-based body said.

The IIHF fined the Russian hockey federation 80,000 Swiss francs ($85,000) after accepting it had apologized to Canadian officials.

The IIHF ruled that the open rink-side gate was "irrelevant" and noted that Russian players and officials were aware of tournament rules "because of their vast experience."

"The panel is of the opinion that the occurrences on the ice show that this is not a result of an unfortunate misunderstanding" as Russia claimed, the IIHF said.

Kovalchuk, the former Atlanta Thrashers and New Jersey Devils forward, was not sanctioned ahead of his country hosting the 2016 worlds.

Kovalchuk retired from the NHL in 2013 to join SKA St. Petersburg ahead of the Sochi Olympics, where Canada won the gold medal.

He had signed a 15-year, $100 million contract with the Devils after being traded from the Thrashers in 2010 but left after three seasons.

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