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Medical Staff for Russian Team Argue 'Smelling Salts Are Legal'

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Andrei Nikerichev / Moskva News Agency

Medical staff with Russia's national team have denied allegations that the country's players took substances to increase their fitness levels during the World Cup.

After Russia's loss to Croatia on Saturday, Germany's Bild tabloid published an article alleging that the team had inhaled smelling salts in the dugout of Sochi's Fisht Stadium during the game. The ammonia inhalants, which are not illegal, could have helped the Russian players increase their "respiratory stimulation" and "improve oxygen supply," Bild reported.

The Russia team's head doctor, Eduard Bezuglov, told the Sport-Express newspaper that the players had used the ammonia-based inhalants "to perk up."

He added that the mixture has been used for decades by "thousands of athletes" around the world and could be purchased at pharmacies.

Pualino Granero, a fitness coach for Russia's team, said the allegations "could only have been

thought up by an idiot."

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"Ammonia is not on the list of banned substances," he was cited as saying by Marca.

Russia's surprising run into the quarterfinals sparked the allegations. Russian players showed impressive physical stamina, with midfielder Roman Zobnin having covered the greatest distance in the tournament— 63 kilometers.

"Extraordinary performances demand additional tests," the head of the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency said last month, while a Saudi newspaper alleged doping after their country's shock 5-0 defeat to the hosts.

Meanwhile, Bild said in its report that "it is absurd that the Russians pretend that [smelling salts] are as common as shampooing while showering," pointing to Russia's history of doping.

After the Sochi Winter Olympics, more than a dozen Russian athletes were stripped of medals over an alleged state-sponsored doping program.

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