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Russian Hockey Star Kuznetsov Gets 4-Year Ban for Cocaine

By Reuters

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Joel Marklund / ZUMA / TASS

The International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) said on Friday it had suspended Russian national team player Evgeny Kuznetsov for four years for testing positive for cocaine.

Kuznetsov, who plays for the Washington Capitals in North America's National Hockey League (NHL), said he accepted his suspension.

"Representing my country has always been so close to my heart and something I take so much pride in," Kuznetsov said in a statement on the team's website.

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"Not being able to put that sweater on for four years is very hard to take."

The NHL and the IIHF operate under different anti-doping rules. Cocaine is not considered a performance-enhancing drug by the NHL, and Kuznetsov's suspension will affect only his ability to play at international competitions such as the Olympic Games and world hockey championships.

"It is considered a drug of abuse that is tested for and for which intervention, evaluation and mandatory treatment can occur in appropriate cases," NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly said in a statement.

Kuznetsov had "voluntarily sought help through the education and counseling program" available at the league and agreed to submit himself to regular drug testing, Daly said.

The IIHF said the substance was detected during a doping control in May at the Ice Hockey World Championship in Slovakia.

A video allegedly showing Kuznetsov sitting next to unidentified lines of white powder was posted online in May. It was not immediately clear whether his positive doping test and the episode are linked.

The Capitals said in a statement they were "disappointed with this development and take this occurrence seriously."

The Russian hockey federation said it opposed the use of banned substances.

Kuznetsov scored 21 goals and had 51 assists last season. He won the Stanley Cup with the Capitals in 2018.

The ban will run until June 12, 2023, the IIHF said.

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