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Covid Clouds Russia-Canada Olympic Women's Hockey Match

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Anton Novoderezhkin / TASS

Covid-19 loomed over the Russia women's third ice hockey fixture against Canada as delayed tests and a spate of positive results disrupted the game, forcing players to take to the ice in face masks.

What the Russian Olympic Committee would dub a "tragicomedy" unfolded after the Canadian side refused to play until the Russian team — which has been badly hit with a number of positive cases in recent days — received their delayed PCR test results.

Despite the Canadians' attempt to stall for time, the teams were eventually forced to get underway one hour after the scheduled start time, with both sides agreeing to wear face masks.

"We just wanted to make sure everybody was safe, so we just thought we would put masks on because it was unclear and we weren't really sure. Our game plan was to make sure we were in masks for the full 60 minutes," Canadian hockey player Rebecca Johnston told The Wall Street

Journal.

After wearing masks for the first two-thirds of the game — a style that seemed to suit the Canadians, who had built a 4-1 lead — the Russian team emerged for the final third unmasked, claiming to have received their results.

Canadian forward Brianne Jenner said the masks were no more than a minor inconvenience as the team had been practicing with them during training sessions.

Not all agreed with that view.

“The situation, of course, is absolutely absurd: it is impossible to play hockey in masks, you can suffocate,” said Russian gold-medal speed skater Svetlana Zhurova.

“I don't understand what's really going on. I don't see it being possible to play hockey in masks. It doesn't make any sense, in my opinion. I can't imagine how you can play a contact sport wearing masks. It's simply impossible," said Rene Fasel, honorary president of the International Ice Hockey Federation.

Six of Russia’s 23 players had been sidelined ahead of the match after testing positive for Covid-19. Meanwhile, Canadian player Emily Clark received an inconclusive result before the game and was unable to play as a result.

With the match finishing 6-1 — a result not as disappointing as it sounds, given the Canadians’ 11-1 and 12-1 dominance over Finland and Switzerland — the Russian side were gracious in defeat, expressing a desire to keep going despite the number of Covid cases that have ravaged the squad.

“We are trying our best and as long as we have enough players to make up the roster it’s all good and we can play,” said Russian player Alexandra Vafina.

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