

U.S. Basketball Star Goes on Trial in Russian Court

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Brittney Griner at the Khimki city court outside Moscow on Friday. **Andrei Nikerichev / Moskva News Agency**

American basketball star Brittney Griner went on trial in a Russian court Friday amid a historic low point in relations between Washington and Moscow.

The WNBA champion and two-time Olympic gold medalist was detained at a Moscow airport in February after security officers allegedly found vape cartridges containing cannabis oil in her luggage.

Griner was photographed entering the Khimki City Court outside Moscow early Friday for the start of her trial.

If found guilty on drug smuggling charges, Griner, 31, faces up to 10 years in prison.

"The U.S. Embassy and the country cares very deeply about this case," Elisabeth Rood, deputy chief to the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, told reporters outside the court.

"She asked me to convey that she is in good spirits and she is keeping up faith."

Griner's lawyer Alexander Boikov said she had "no complaints about the conditions of her detention."

He added that she is practicing sport "in her cell and on walks."

Griner had been in Russia to play for UMMC Ekaterinburg during the WNBA off-season.

She was detained just days before Russia invaded Ukraine, which was quickly followed by Western sanctions and a fallout in bilateral ties.

Related article: [U.S. Says Basketball Star 'Wrongfully Detained' in Russia](#)

State Department officials [reclassified](#) her as wrongfully detained in May and handed oversight of her case over to the special presidential envoy for hostage affairs, who is the principal negotiator for the U.S. government.

Her supporters have called on U.S. officials to seek her release by way of a prisoner exchange, as Russian courts rarely hand down acquittals.

While efforts to negotiate her release will face the challenge of almost nonexistent diplomatic ties between Washington and Moscow, the two sides carried out a high-profile prisoner swap in April, exchanging Russian pilot Konstantin Yaroshenko for former U.S. Marine Trevor Reed.

Griner's wife, Cherelle, has [urged](#) U.S. President Joe Biden to secure her release, calling her "a political pawn."

The WNBA has also said it is working to bring Griner — considered one of the greatest female basketball players — home.

AFP contributed reporting.

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