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Russian Champion Skaters Killed in U.S. Plane Crash

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Russian pair skaters Yevgenia Shishkova and Vadim Naumov at the 1994 Lillehammer Olympics.
Vladimir Bezzubov / TASS

Russian figure skaters including world champion couple Evgenia Shishkova and Vadim Naumov, who won the 1994 pairs title, were on board a U.S. passenger jet that crashed in Washington on Wednesday.

The plane carrying 60 passengers and four crew collided midair with a military helicopter as it was approaching Reagan National Airport on Wednesday evening, plunging into the freezing Potomac River. U.S. officials said that they believed no one survived the crash.

The state-run TASS news agency reported, citing anonymous sources, that Shishkova and Naumov, who won the 1994 world pairs title, were on board the plane. Former Soviet pairs skater Inna Volyanskaya was also on board.

"We see that this sad information is being confirmed. There were other fellow citizens [of Russia]," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

“We express condolences to the families and friends who lost our fellow citizens,” Peskov said, describing the tragedy as “bad news from Washington.”

U.S. Figure Skating said several athletes, coaches and officials were aboard the flight, which was returning to Washington from an event in Wichita, Kansas.

Shishkova and Naumov had watched their 23-year-old son, Maxim Naumov, place fourth in the competition in Wichita, but had departed Kansas on an earlier flight.

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The club’s CEO Doug Zeghibe was quoted as saying 14 of the crash victims were en route from the national development camp for promising young skaters.

“Our sport and this club have suffered a horrible loss with this tragedy. Skating is a tight-knit community where parents and kids come together six or seven days a week to train and work together. Everyone is like family,” Zeghibe said in a statement.

Shishkova, 52, and Naumov, 55, who married in 1995, ended their careers after failing to qualify for the Nagano Winter Olympics in 1998.

After becoming professionals, they moved to the United States to become coaches, first in Connecticut then in Boston in 2017.

Shishkova and Naumov were “very much a part of our building the competitive skating program here at the Skating Club of Boston,” Zeghibe said.

The Russian couple’s favorite pupil was their own son. Shishkova and Naumov, who were from St. Petersburg, won gold for pairs in the 1994 World Skating Championship in Japan and competed in the 1992 and 1994 Olympics.

In 1998, they left Russia and moved to Simsbury, Connecticut where they began coaching at the International Skating Center of Connecticut, where they worked for nearly two decades.

“In Russia, it still wasn’t a very good time. After the Soviet Union collapsed, all the coaches started to leave,” said Shishkova about the couple’s emigration. “Year after year, we realized we made the right decision to stay here,” Shishkova said in a 2018 interview.

Also onboard the flight was Inna Volyanskaya, a Soviet pairs skater who competed internationally in the 1980s with her former husband Valery Spiridonov. Volyanskaya won medals at several international competitions, including gold at the 1982 Grand Prix International St. Gervais. After retiring from competition, she skated for the ice ballet production of Tatiana Tarasova, called Russian All-Stars, as well as in Disney on Ice. Most recently, she coached at the Ashburn Ice House in Virginia.

Among Volyanskaya’s pupils was Franco Aparicio, who was accompanied on the flight by his father, Luciano Aparicio. He was part of the Washington Figure Skating Club.

Two sisters who were also members of the Washington Figure Skating Club, Everly and Alydia

Livingston, ages 14 and 11 years, and their parents, Peter and Donna, were also onboard.

Among the Boston club's members onboard the flight were Christine Lane and her 16-year-old son, Spencer Lane, and 13-year-old Jinna Han, and her mother Jin Han.

Also onboard were parents Kaiyan Mao, Yu Zhou and their 16-year-old son Edward, a skater who trained at the Fairfax Ice Arena in Virginia.

Cory Haynos perished with his parents, Roger and Stephanie Haynos. Cory, aged 16, was part of the Skating Club of Northern Virginia.

Also from Virginia were Justyna Beyer and her 12-year-old daughter, Brielle, a skater who had survived cancer as an infant.

Also onboard was coach Alexander Kirsanov, who was accompanying his students Angela Yang and Sean Kay to the competition, who trained at the University of Delaware Figure Skating Club. Kirsanov competed internationally for the United States, Azerbaijan and Russia.

U.S. Olympic medalist Nancy Kerrigan, who trained at the Boston club, gave a tearful address rinkside after news of the tragedy.

"Not sure how to process it, which is why I'm here.... We just wanted to be here, and be part of our community," Kerrigan said.

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