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Putin Congratulates Ovechkin on NHL Goals Record

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Dynamo Stadium in Moscow celebrating Ovechkin's record over the weekend. **Roman Shluinsky / TASS**

President Vladimir Putin on Monday congratulated Washington Capitals forward Alex Ovechkin for breaking the NHL's all-time goals record, calling the achievement a source of celebration in Russia.

Ovechkin, 39, scored his 895th career goal on Sunday, surpassing Wayne Gretzky's long-standing record that had gone unchallenged for 26 years.

"Congratulations on your outstanding record. You've surprised legendary masters," Putin said in a message posted to the Kremlin's Telegram channel. "Without a doubt, this achievement is not only your personal success but a true celebration for fans in Russia and abroad."

Putin's economic envoy Kirill Dmitriev, who heads the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), said Ovechkin's record-breaking goal could help unite Russia and the United States.

Russia's Embassy in Washington highlighted the "unifying potential of hockey," which it said was discussed during a recent call between Putin and U.S. President Donald Trump. It also condemned the "ridiculous and absurd" ban on Russian journalists' accreditation at NHL games.

Related article: Ovechkin Scores 895th Goal to Clinch All-Time NHL Record

Meanwhile, Russian state news agency RIA Novosti published footage of FBI Director Kash Patel visiting the Capitals' locker room and calling Ovechkin's achievement "awesome."

The Russian Olympic Committee was among the first to congratulate Ovechkin, saying, "The absolute record now belongs to our hockey player."

Ovechkin has faced criticism over his support of Putin, especially after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

In 2018, the hockey player founded the "PutinTeam" campaign group to help back the Russian leader's re-election bid. Likewise, his profile picture on Instagram shows him standing alongside the Russian leader.

When asked about the Ukraine war at a press conference in 2022, Ovechkin called for "no more war," but gave a muted response when questioned about his prior support for Putin.

"Well, he is my president. But as I said, I am not in politics. I am an athlete and I hope everything is going to be done soon," the hockey player said at the time. "I'm Russian. It's something I can't control. It's not in my hands. I hope [the war] is going to end soon."

AFP contributed reporting.

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