

Kremlin Claims Ovechkin's NHL Goal Record as Propaganda Victory

While the Washington Capitals forward has lived and played in the U.S. for the past two decades, his sporting feat over the weekend provided a rare source of pride recognized both in Russia and beyond its borders.

By [Pyotr Kozlov](#)

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Alexander Ovechkin celebrates his 895th career goal on Sunday. AP / TASS

Late Sunday evening, Moscow residents may have been surprised to see NHL star Alexander Ovechkin's image and the number "895" projected onto the Ostankino TV tower on the north side of the Russian capital.

The 540-meter Soviet-era monolith, completed in 1963 just months after the Cuban Missile Crisis, lit up to mark a historic sporting moment: Ovechkin had scored his 895th career goal,

breaking the NHL's all-time scoring record.

By Monday morning, the Washington Capitals forward's name was echoing across Russian state television and pro-war social media channels. His achievement was framed not just as a personal triumph, but a national victory — proof, propagandists claimed, that Russia remains a global force, even amid Western attempts to “cancel” the country over its war in Ukraine.

The message was clear: A Russian athlete had made history.

State-run Rossiya 1's primetime program “60 Minutes” [devoted](#) a 15-minute segment to Ovechkin on Monday, not only celebrating his sporting feat but also underscoring his role as the founder of Putin Team, the movement that supported President Vladimir Putin's 2018 re-election campaign.

Ovechkin and Putin share a longstanding personal friendship. The president even once called the hockey player during a G20 summit to personally congratulate him on his wedding day.

When Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, Ovechkin posted a photo of himself holding a sign reading “#SaveChildrenFromFascism” on Instagram — a hashtag used by Russian state media to justify Moscow's aggression against Ukraine. And after Russia launched the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the hockey player, who has lived and played in the United States for two decades, did not condemn the war but instead said he was “not in politics” and that the war was a “hard situation right now for both sides.”

Related article: [Putin Congratulates Ovechkin on NHL Goals Record](#)

During Monday's “60 Minutes” program, host Olga Skabueva, a vocal war supporter, cited Ovechkin's continued loyalty to Putin — even after receiving threats that led his team to hire personal security — as evidence of his patriotism.

By 8 a.m. Moscow time, Putin, a longtime hockey enthusiast who once played with Ovechkin in 2016, issued a public congratulatory message. “Without a doubt, this latest achievement is not only a personal triumph for you but also a true celebration for fans in Russia and beyond,” it [read](#).

Putin, who is known to step back from the spotlight during national tragedies — including the deadly Kursk submarine disaster in 2000 and recent Ukrainian incursions into Russia's Kursk region — appeared eager to align himself with this unambiguous sporting victory.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov later said that Putin and Ovechkin had not yet spoken by phone, but suggested that any potential call would be prominently featured in state television's weekly political roundups.

Officials and politicians across Russia were also quick to issue their own congratulatory statements.

“895 — the mark of a great Russian hockey player! P.S. Awaiting the suicide of that crazy Czech, Hasek,” former President Dmitry Medvedev [said](#), referring to Dominik Hasek, the retired Czech goaltender who has criticized Ovechkin for his public support of Putin.

“A brilliant example of soft power and defending Russia’s interests on the international stage,” [wrote](#) Georgy Filimonov, the governor of the northwestern Vologda region who is notorious for his pro-Stalin views and introducing restrictions on alcohol sales in his region.

Joining the chorus were Soviet hockey [legends](#) Vyacheslav Fetisov and Vladislav Tretyak, now both lawmakers in the lower-house State Duma from the ruling United Russia party.

“Our Russian boy has done the impossible. Today, we celebrate a great day. I don’t think anyone will surpass this in the next 100 years,” said Fetisov, who played in the NHL for the New Jersey Devils and the Detroit Red Wings.

“Sport has always been an ambassador of peace and friendship,” said Tretyak, a celebrated Soviet goaltender and three-time Olympic champion.

But Russia’s pro-war bloggers, who boast large followings online, see Ovechkin’s achievement through an entirely different lens: not as a sporting milestone, but a geopolitical victory over the West.

“Ovechkin’s goal, breaking the NHL scoring record that stood since 1999, carries direct significance for us in the ongoing confrontation with NATO. Let our friends rejoice and our enemies suffer,” [wrote](#) Starshe Eddy, a pro-military Telegram channel with almost 500,000 subscribers.

“Yes, we all know the war continues. But it’s easier to fight it when good Russian men are winning, not just on the battlefield,” the post added.

Russian state propagandists also seized on Ovechkin’s post-game chant of “Russians, we did it!” following his record goal at Washington’s Capital One Arena.

Related article: [Champagne, Tea Sets and Social Movements: The Ovechkin-Putin Relationship](#)

Though he has spent the past two decades in the United States, Ovechkin has repeatedly said he plans to return to Russia after retirement. His children, born in the U.S., attend a Russian school, and he has said, “I can’t imagine speaking to my kids in English.”

“He was raised right. That’s how his parents and Russia brought him up. He’s still on Putin Team. Just like all of us,” Sports Minister Mikhail Degtyarev, a member of the nationalist LDPR party and Ukraine war supporter, [said](#) on the Gazprom-funded Match sports channel.

The host interviewing Degtyarev signed off by saying: “I’m sure Donald Trump is preparing a congratulatory message for Ovechkin or has already sent one.”

For many Russians, Ovechkin’s accomplishment provided a rare source of pride recognized outside Russia’s borders — without controversy. This, according to political commentator Georgy Bovt, is what [explains](#) the excitement around his NHL record.

“The average Russian still has an unmet demand for victory. Not the one that took place 80 years ago, although people continue to take pride in it, but a victory that is happening now,”

Bovt argued. "A victory where, first of all, Russians are the winners, and secondly, this victory is acknowledged by the rest of the world."

"Especially since Russian athletes have been banned from most [global sporting] competitions... people are left to take pride in the victories of a Russian-American athlete," he concluded.

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