

# NHL All-Time Record Scorer Ovechkin Calls for Russian Return to Global Sports

By [AFP](#)

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Russian NHL star Alexander Ovechkin in Moscow. **Alexander Nemenov/AFP**

NHL all-time record goal scorer Alexander Ovechkin called for Russian athletes to be allowed to compete at the world's top sporting events again, as he was greeted by hundreds of adoring fans during a visit to Moscow on Saturday.

The Washington Capitals ace received a jubilant reception during his first trip home since scoring his 895th goal last April to overtake the previous all-time record held by Canadian ice hockey legend Wayne Gretzky.

"I hope that in the near future we will be allowed to participate and the guys will be able to take part in Olympiads and world championships to represent their country," the ice hockey superstar told AFP.

Surrounded by swarms of journalists and ecstatic fans, he walked a Moscow high-end street

which had been decked out with "Ovechkin 8" hockey jerseys and signs reading "eternal record."

Russians have had little opportunity to celebrate international sporting success over the past three years, kicked out of a host of competitions over the Kremlin's Ukraine war.

But Ovechkin's triumph offered them a rare chance to do so.

## **'That would be epic'**

Hundreds of fans lined up for an autograph at an outdoor ice rink, which serves as a football pitch during warm months.

"Ovi, Ovi," the fans chanted Ovechkin's American nickname.

This rink in a typical Moscow suburb is where the 39-year-old left wing striker took the first steps of his illustrious career.

The rink stands out from the grey high-rise apartment blocks surrounding it, after having been carefully renovated by a sponsor, replete with a massive sign reading "eternal record 895" freshly painted on its surface.

Antonina Mikhailova, an IT manager wearing Ovechkin's jersey, told AFP: "Whatever happens in the world, sport has no borders."

"That would be epic, we must do that!" insisted Fyodor Troshin, an amateur hockey player also waiting for Ovechkin, of the prospect of Russian athletes returning to international sport events.

"People like Alexander Ovechkin are bringing Russian sport closer to (international) leagues," the 40-year-old added.

Despite his prowess on the ice, Ovechkin's politics and Russian connections have stoked some controversy, as he has been a prominent supporter of Vladimir Putin's 25-year rule, even after troops were sent to Ukraine.

In a political balancing act, Ovechkin has not denounced Moscow's Ukraine offensive, but he has also carefully veered away from supporting it — despite knowing such a move would be welcomed by Putin.

"I felt proud of what we achieved, of breaking the record," Ovechkin, who is famously missing a front tooth, told AFP of breaking Gretzky's 26-year mark.

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