

Czechs Light Candles and Sing Anthem for Lokomotiv Yaroslavl

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Mourners paying respect to victims of the Yaroslavl plane crash at the Old Town Square in Prague on Thursday. **David W Cerny**

PRAGUE — Hundreds of mourners gathered in the heart of Prague on Thursday to pay tribute to the three Czech ice hockey players killed in the plane crash that devastated the Lokomotiv Yaroslavl team. ☒

People lit candles around a simple impromptu monument in the Old Town Square formed by two ice hockey sticks, some wearing the Czech national team jersey and chanting the names of the three players — Karel Rachunek, Jan Marek and Josef Vasicek.

After a person in the crowd shouted, "Let's sing the anthem for the guys," the mourners sang the Czech national anthem. ☒

"Thank you, guys," they chanted after that.

☒ In the past, the Old Town Square was the site of celebrations of Czech world championship

hockey titles with fans and players partying together. On Thursday, the atmosphere was one of grief and sorrow.

☒ "It's a tragedy," said Petr Kubalek, 28, from Prague. "That's all I can say. I knew Marek personally."

☒ Many people signed the two condolence books that were placed at the square.

☒ "The winners forever," one of the entries said.

☒ The three players helped the Czech national team win the gold medal at the world championships in 2005 and 2010. ☒

Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg said Lokomotiv Yaroslavl has offered to transport the bodies of the three to the Czech Republic.

☒ "We welcome this initiative," Schwarzenberg said.

☒ The Czech ice hockey federation plans an official farewell ceremony for the players after their bodies return home, federation president Tomas Kral said.

He said the players' national team jersey numbers will be retired. ☒ A minute of silence will be observed at Czech arenas at the start of the top league season, he said. ☒

In the Slovak capital, Bratislava, President Ivan Gasparovic lit a candle in the chapel of the presidential palace to commemorate Pavol Demitra, former captain of the Slovak national team, another victim of the Russian crash. ☒ "I wanted to honor him at least by that," he said.

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