

Putin Bags Judo Gold During London Visit

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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President Vladimir Putin congratulating Dagestani native Tagir Khaibulaev after he took the gold in 100 kg judo at the London Olympics on Thursday. **Darren Staples**

Top 20 Medalists

LONDON — Black-belt Vladimir Putin locked horns on Thursday with British leader David Cameron over Syria and a crackdown on Kremlin opponents before watching Russia take gold in an afternoon of judo diplomacy at the Olympic Games.

Putin, who dispensed with his dark jacket in the heat of the final, shot to his feet, roaring cheers for the native of Dagestan who took the gold medal in a men's judo final.

Putin then slipped back into his suit jacket and rushed down to the mats to congratulate Tagir Khaibulaev, slapping him on the back and grabbing his cheeks with both hands.

“You should be proud,” Putin was heard telling Khaibulaev.

Later Khaibulaev, 28, praised Putin for his support.

“He has been cheering for us for four years now and he really cares for the sport. I am so happy I managed to make him happy,” he told reporters.

Cameron tried to push Putin to take a tougher line on Syria and stop blocking Western-backed UN resolutions aimed at stepping up pressure on President Bashar Assad.

But after 45 minutes of talks in Downing Street, for which Putin put in an unusually punctual appearance, Cameron and Putin said Russia and Britain still differed over Syria.

“I look forward to taking the president to the judo but note that we will be spectators, not participants,” Cameron told reporters.

Then the two men traveled to the Olympics, Putin in his black stretch Mercedes with Russian license plates, and Cameron in his armored gray Jaguar.

In their second-row seats, Putin spent time appearing to educate Cameron on the finer points of judo. With an interpreter leaning over their shoulders, Putin would lean in toward Cameron, talk a bit and make a few gestures with his hands, the British prime minister mostly nodding. The talking stopped when Khaibulaev defeated Olympic champion Tuvshinbayar Naidan of Mongolia in the 100kg weight class.

Putin’s private visit at Cameron’s invitation has raised eyebrows. Putin is facing accusations of trying to silence dissent after members of the band Pussy Riot went on trial. Cameron mentioned Pussy Riot during the talks with Putin. (Related story, p. 3.) As Putin entered the prime minister’s office, a protester screamed, “Free Pussy Riot,” which echoed across Downing Street.

During their talks, Cameron and Putin also discussed Russia’s reluctance to support a United Nations resolution trying to halt Syrian violence. Speaking through an interpreter, Putin said the nations would “continue working to find a viable solution.”

When talk turned to sport, Putin seemed far more at ease.

“Unforgettable,” he said in reference to the opening ceremony of the London games.

(Reuters, AP)

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