

How to Shout Like Crazy at Sochi Hockey Matches

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Шайба: puck

I am always uncomfortable when the Olympics come around. Most Russians like sports. They know sports. They get excited about sports.

But me? I don't watch or play competitive sports. In fact, the only sport I have achieved any competence in is scuba diving, which is as exciting to watch as grass growing and as competitive as a Kumbaya song fest.

But I got hooked on the hockey match between the U.S. and Russian teams last week. Not because of some geopolitical rivalry — half these guys play on the same teams in real life — but because there was what commentators call равная борьба (an even match). I got so excited I wanted to talk about the match in Russian, which meant that first I had to learn Russian hockey-speak.

The first thing to know is what the game is called in Russian. If you say я люблю хоккей (I love hockey), you might be asked: Какой? (Which kind?) Your choice is between хоккей на траве (field hockey, literally "hockey on the grass") and хоккей с шайбой (ice hockey, literally "hockey with a puck"). If you find that curious — shouldn't we mention ice? — someone will point out: Попробуйте сыграть с шайбой на траве (Try playing with a puck on the grass.)

Next you need to know a couple of words that you will hear the spectators shouting like crazy. One is шайба (puck). Since to score is забить шайбу в ворота (to hit the puck into the goal) Russian болельщики or фанаты (fans) chant Шайбу! Шайбу! Шайбу! (Score! Score! Score!) Now it's a kind of generalized chant to spur on the team: Go, team, go!

The other word that you are likely to hear is мыло (soap) as in: судью на мыло (send the ref to the glue factory, literally, turn "the referee into soap"). This means that the referee made a bad call, or more specifically: the call the ref made was stupid, unfair, and corrupt, and if he hadn't made it, our team would have won. At U.S. games, this is usually expressed with expletives or interesting hand gestures.

For the match I watched, I had to learn the terms буллиты (bullet) and серия послематчевых буллитов (game-winning shots or shoot-out). In hockey, if you don't win in the match or overtime, this is where the game ends happily — выиграть по буллитам (win in the shoot-out) — or sadly — проиграть по буллитам (lose in the shoot-out).

Winning and losing can be expressed variously, from neutral to highly expressive. Neutral: Встреча завершилась со счетом 3:2 в пользу американцев (The match ended 3:2 in favor of the American team.) Американцы выиграли (The Americans won.) Российские хоккеисты победили Норвегию (The Russian hockey players defeated Norway.) Сборная США по хоккею одержала победу над Словенией (The U.S. national hockey team won the match with the team from Slovenia). Сборная России проиграла сборной США (The Russian team lost to the U.S. team.)

Moderately triumphant: Команда России без особых проблем переиграла сборную Словении (The Russian team had no trouble beating the Slovenian team.) Сборная России нанесла поражение команде Норвегии (The Russian team trounced the Norwegian team.)

Triumphant: Швеция разгромила Словению (Sweden crushed Slovenia.)

Heartbroken: Поражение! Сборная России выбыла из борьбы за хоккейное "золото" (Defeat! The Russian national team was eliminated from the battle for the Olympic gold.)

To that news, we can only quote a famous Russian sports commentator: Такой хоккей нам не нужен (Who needs this kind of hockey!?)

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