

Russia Takes Gold in Men's Biathlon Relay

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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KRASNAYA POLYANA— Russia made its fans wait for a biathlon gold medal until the last race of the Sochi Games.

Despite missing eight targets, the Russian team won the men's 4 x 7.5-kilometer relay on Saturday, sending the home nation to the top of the medal table.

"The whole team has been waiting for this gold medal," said Dmitry Malyshko, who skied the third leg for Russia. "We are really happy we could make this dream come true."

With Russia's men and women having won just one bronze and two silver medals in the previous 10 biathlon events, the country had failed to live up to expectations in one of its signature winter sports.

Alexei Volkov, Yevgeny Ustyugov and Malyshko kept Russia in third position for most of the

race before anchor Anton Shipulin beat Germany's Simon Schempp on the final lap.

A sea of Russian flags and loud chants awaited the Russians every time they entered the 7,500-capacity Laura biathlon stadium.

"It is a very special feeling," said Ustyugov, who won a mass start gold in Vancouver four years ago. "With every step you heard the people shouting. It gave me even more energy."

Since 1960, the Soviet Union and Russia have won 19 Olympic gold medals in biathlon, more than any other nation.

Germany, which only missed two targets, finished 3.5 seconds behind Russia. Austria, with seven reloads, got the bronze, 29.8 seconds back.

The Russians surprisingly left Yevgeny Garanichev out of the team even though he was their only medalist in the men's competition, having won bronze in the individual race.

The move panned out well, though, as his replacement, Volkov, was in third position at the first exchange.

Defending champion Norway led for most of the competition but dropped to fourth after anchor Emil Hegle Svendsen missed three targets in his final shooting. His poor aim denied teammate Ole Einar Bjoerndalen the chance of winning a record ninth career gold medal in the Winter Olympics.

Competing in his last Olympic race, the 40-year-old Bjoerndalen shot flawlessly but still lost 18 seconds of Norway's 20-second lead over Germany in the third leg.

"It was really sad we did not get a medal today," said Bjoerndalen.

Still, he won two gold medals at Sochi to become the world's most decorated Winter Olympian. "It is better than I thought before the Olympics," Bjoerndalen said.

Shipulin started the final lap 16.6 seconds behind Svendsen and had to reload twice in his prone shooting, but still managed to close the gap with Norway and Germany.

Schempp and Shipulin both shot cleanly at the standing range and left almost simultaneously.

The German stayed in the lead until the final kilometer, when Shipulin overtook him and gradually increased the gap.

"It was a really tough last lap," Schempp said. "I came very quick off the shooting range and was running at maximum speed for the first half but I got tired in the end. Anton made a gap of three, four meters, then I knew it was all over. But silver is a great result."

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