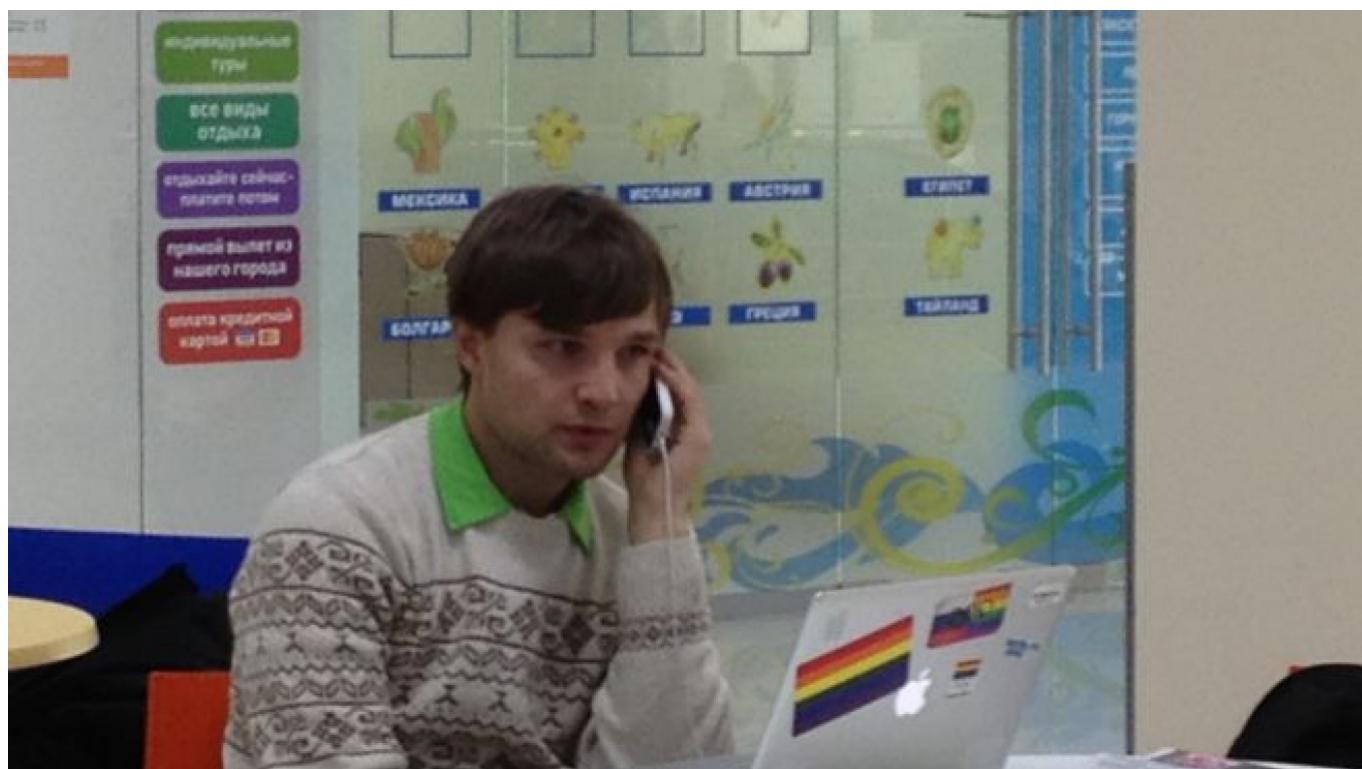


LGBT Games Interrupted by Smoke Bomb and Intimidation

By [Gabrielle Tetrault-Farber](#)

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Konstantin Yablotsky, founder of the Russian Open Games, talking on the phone in a shopping mall in northern Moscow on Friday after having been forced to leave a sports venue. (Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber for MT)

When the FSB is around, where there's smoke, there isn't necessarily fire.

A man who identified himself as a Federal Security Service employee cut short the basketball portion of the Russian Open Games, Russia's first athletic festival geared toward the LGBT community, after apparently setting off a smoke bomb in the venue in northern Moscow, according to Games' organizers.

Anastasia Kurchenkova, one of the organizers of the Open Games, said the incident occurred Friday after the FSB unsuccessfully attempted to intimidate the owners of the facility.

"The FSB first called the owners to tell them we were going to conduct a protest and run around naked in the gym, which was not the case at all," Kurchenkova said.

A few hours later, a man who showed identification saying he was from the FSB came to inspect the venue.

"I had stepped outside for just a moment," Kurchenkova said. "The next thing I know, a man was screaming 'Fire, fire!' and there was smoke everywhere. But no fire."

Artificial smoke, mass hotel cancellations and last-minute venue changes have been just a few of the obstacles the Russian Open Games' organizers have faced in their attempts to hold their event, aimed at bringing together lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender sports enthusiasts from around the world.

Organizers say that on the eve of the Games, nearly all venues refused to hold events and hotels cancelled participants' bookings after having been pressured by authorities.

Police have said they were unaware of incidents of harassment, and City Hall has not commented on the claims by organizers. The FSB, a highly secretive agency that often does not comment to journalists, could not be reached for comment Friday evening.

Ironically, security concerns also have added to the Games' logistical and organizational problems.

The schedule and precise location of the Games' events are not available online, partly in an apparent attempt to prevent potential confrontations with anti-gay activists. The Open Games' official website also says that its content is intended for "the use of those 18 and over," suggesting that it does not violate the law banning the propaganda of "nontraditional sexual relations" among minors signed by President Vladimir Putin last year.

In these word-of-mouth Games, participants instead receive information about the next day's events late at night, in a schedule filled with asterisks and the phrase "to be determined."

A Moscow Times reporter received the address of the basketball venue by text message and was requested not to share it. By the time the reporter arrived, the participants had already been forced out by the smoke bomb.

Spoilers have found the locations of other events as well.

When Games participants arrived at a public skating rink in Moscow's Park Pobedy on Thursday, they rented skates and hopped onto the ice. Minutes later, the rink's management announced that all skaters had to leave because of "technical problems" with the ice.

"There was nothing wrong with anything," said Cyril Millet, director of operations of the Paris 2018 Gay Games, who came to Moscow to participate in the Games and support his Muscovite counterparts. "It was just their way of getting us to leave. This was not the first time sudden 'problems' forced us to change our plans."

The Games' opening ceremony, which was to take place at Moscow's Boyz Club on Tuesday, was abruptly cancelled by a police intervention after the club received an anonymous bomb threat.

The organizers were also forced to cancel a conference at a Moscow hotel after the venue's management cut off the lights. Another venue cancelled the organizers' reservation because of supposed plumbing problems.

"In Paris, authorities would do everything to allow the event to take place," said Cyril Belier, director of the cultural program of the Paris 2018 Gay Games. "They would even provide us with more security if needed. But here, they are doing everything to stop it."

In spite of the various obstacles they have faced, organizers and participants have remained upbeat about their project.

"The FSB showed up at the basketball court in the early afternoon, but we had been playing since 10 a.m.," said Konstantin Yablotsky, founder of the Russian Open Games and co-president of the Russian LGBT Sport Federation. "We have still been doing what we had planned to do."

Tolyatti native Kirill Shestakov traveled 800 kilometers from his home city to participate in the Games. He said he wasn't disappointed about having had little playing time despite having taken vacation from his job at a restaurant to make the trip.

"I am still glad I came," Shestakov said. "I am proud to support this initiative and to be here for the Russian LGBT community."

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