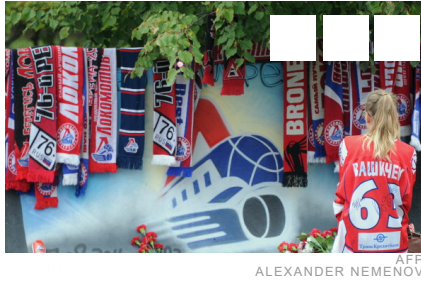


# FOUR YEARS LATER: REMEMBERING THE LOKOMOTIV YAROSLAVL AIR DISASTER

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 December 7, 2015



AFP  
ALEXANDER NEMENOV

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As hockey fans, we go through the motions of each game, cheering on our teams with a boost of adrenaline when they win and a feeling akin to carrying a bag of rocks when they lose. We all come together — whether in the lobby of the arena, at a local bar or through social media from the comforts of our own homes — and talk about what went right or what went wrong, do our best to analyze what we saw before parting until the next game. Through everything, we expect the best from our teams which

leaves us sometimes disappointed. Yet while that disappointment is palpable, it is fleeting and once it passes, we unite as fans cheering on our team to the fullest of our abilities at the next game.

But for as often as we unite as one team's fanbase, we are sometimes forced to unite as hockey fans in general or, better yet, as compassionate human beings. This was the case on September 7, 2011.

Today marks the four-year anniversary of the airline tragedy of **Yak-Service Flight 9633** that took the lives of 43 of the 45 passengers on board, including the entire **Lokomotiv Yaroslavl** team. After **Alexander Galimov**, who was one of the two rescued at the site, died five days later, the avionics flight engineer, **Alexander Sizov**, was declared the only survivor.

This writer remembers exactly where he was when he heard the news. Having just picked up some breakfast, I walked into my office and turned on my computer when my editor texted me, asking to write something immediately on the following news story. Opening the link attached, I was mortified — moreso because one of this writer's favourite players, **Pavol Demitra**, was one of the passengers — but shocked in general nonetheless.



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MICHAL CIZEK

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So excited not only for the upcoming **NHL** season to start but for a month-long stay in Los Angeles, said feeling quickly faded. All of a sudden, it didn't seem to matter. Never mind that Pavol Demitra was one this writer's favourite players, or that a good friend — a proud Latvian — had lost a fellow countryman in **Karlis Skrastins**, or that **Ruslan Salei** ever played for the reviled crosstown rival, **Anaheim Ducks**. These weren't former opponents anymore. These were human beings whose deaths had shaken an entire hockey community from **Yaroslavl, Russia** to **St. John's, Newfoundland** to **Los Angeles, California**.



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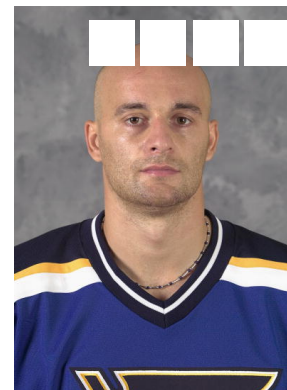
Fans of the **Los Angeles Kings** no longer cared how many times Ruslan Salei scored or set up a goal against their team. Fans of the **New Jersey Devils** no longer cared about **Alexander Karpovtsev** helping his **New York Rangers** defeat them in the **1994 Eastern Conference Final**. Fans of the **Montreal Canadiens** no longer cared about **Brad McCrimmon's** contributions in the **1989 Stanley Cup Final** to propel his **Calgary Flames** to victory. Whatever animosity was felt on the ice, from the stands or from a living room TV was gone. At the end of the day, these

players were no more and no less human than you or I. When they died, they left behind a plethora of family and friends to mourn for them — just as if you and I would do if our time was at hand.

Scheduled to participate in the 2011-12 **KHL** season, Lokomotiv Yaroslavl decided to cancel their campaign, instead choosing to play in the **Russian Major League (VHL)**. Out of respect, the KHL postponed their season-opener by five days.

After tragedy remains life and those affected by the Lokomotiv air disaster have slowly but surely picked up the pieces and learned to move on — some more difficult than others.

This writer thinks about his time at camp in the summer of 2000 when he shaved his head bald for the very first time. The new look to go in hand with an in-fashion necklace and a **St. Louis Blues** jersey filled this writer with immense pride and unflappable confidence knowing just how much he resembled Pavol Demitra. How uncanny the resemble actually was to others was unknown but nonetheless, the feeling of looking so much like one of your favourite players is something that made this writer feel wonderful, failing to conceal a glowing smile.

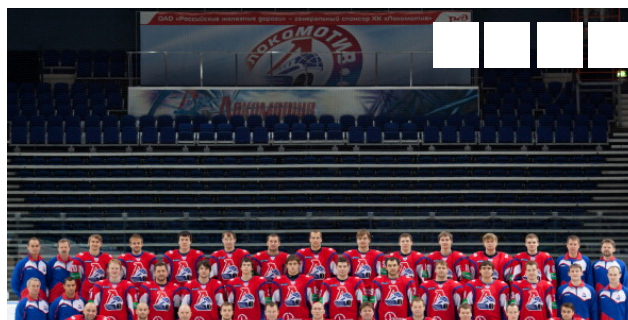


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On this, the four-year anniversary of this tragedy, we remember where we were, how we felt and, most importantly, how we united not only as hockey fans but as compassionate human beings.

Lest we forget.





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