

# POST-SLAVA VOYNOV ERA BEGINS; SHOULD BE WORTHWHILE FOR LA KINGS

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It is the sad end of a sorry episode.

**Slava Voynov's** tenure with the **Los Angeles Kings** has ended. The suspended defenseman announced last month that he would be leaving the club to return to his native Russia, shortly after being taken into custody by **U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement**, which followed a brief jail sentence.

As of Saturday morning, Slava Voynov has officially moved on from the Kings and the **NHL** when it was reported that he will sign with **SKA St. Petersburg** of the KHL. There, he will be joining former NHLers **Ilya Kovalchuk** and **Alexei Ponikarovsky**.

When he was first suspended by the **National Hockey League** following his arrest last October, this writer felt that Slava Voynov wasn't treated fairly. After all, at that point, no substantial evidence had been disclosed regarding the domestic violence incident the blueliner had been arrested for. Of course, in their defense, it could be argued that with the heinous video footage of **NFLer Ray Rice** abusing his then-girlfriend, the NHL felt they needed to be immediately proactive. Still, it was a premature decision to suspend Voynov — one I cannot justify on their behalf, especially when it meant leaving the Russian's \$4.2 million salary on the Kings' books.

Initially, this writer — like many fans — was hoping that the accusations against Voynov were untrue, for the sake of the well-being of his wife but, selfishly, because he was such an invaluable member of the Kings' championship success. After all, if it wasn't for his crucial block on **Rick Nash** in Game 5 of the **2014 Stanley Cup Final**, there would be no historic overtime goal, **Alec Martinez** would not be in the annals of history as there would be no celebrating a goal that never happened. Thanks to Slava Voynov and his defensive stop just moments prior, the Los Angeles Kings and their ever-loyal fanbase will remember said iconic moment for the rest of their lives.

But as weeks went on in Voynov's domestic violence case, more details emerged and, as a result, this writer ceased caring about how talented Slava Voynov was as a player and what he meant to the Kings. Frankly, his on-ice capabilities had become a moot point.



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Setting up goals should lead to more power play time, blocking shots

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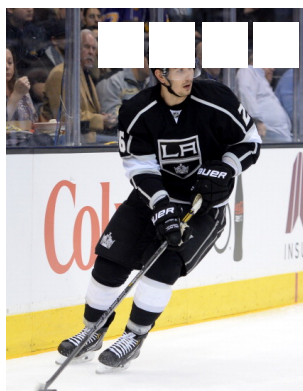
should lead to quarterbacking the penalty-killing unit, but beating your wife should lead to the showing of an exit.

Slava Voynov did not set a precedent in violence against women. It has happened all too often and the sports world is not immune. But, while they may not have been active in making an example of Voynov while he was still a member of the team, the Los Angeles Kings did make a crucial step forward in announcing a series of personal conduct training initiatives in addition to partnerships with various social groups to help better educate their employees and help instill the club's values and principles.

These initiatives include **Kings Over Violence**, a promotional campaign in partnership with **Peace Over Violence** to increase awareness against violence. Another campaign will be **The Herren Project**, which will be dedicated to educating players about drug and alcohol abuse. The organization has also put sexual harassment training in place for their employees.

If I had a daughter or a sister, I would not know where to begin in terms of justifying my support for a team that would tolerate abuse against a woman. Thankfully, due to Voynov's departure in addition to the aforementioned actions taken by the Kings, no justification is necessary. Thus, while it may seem like common sense to some for more teams to have these initiatives in place, that is not the case and regardless, the Los Angeles Kings should be commended for taking these steps.

Still, there have been fans who — some of which have daughters — continue to defend Voynov by making excuses for the blueliner that were ill-conceived at best. To say that, "we weren't there" or, "I guess you never made a mistake" suggests that some fans were willing to ignore the elephant in the room and sweep everything under the rug for the sake of holding onto the wavering hope that Voynov is a perfect gentleman because he's just too skilled of a defenseman not to be.



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To some of those who have defended Voynov, this writer asked one simple question: "What if the victim were your daughter?"

Dead silence, yet the question was answered nonetheless.

While he is undoubtedly a talented, experienced defenseman — and for his on-ice contributions, he will be missed — the notion of defending Slava Voynov still cannot be justified on a personal level.

The Slava Voynov era is now officially over in Los Angeles. Whether or not it will continue later on is unknown but for the foreseeable future, the Kings are now free of the black cloud that

has hovered over their team for nearly a year.

This summer, I had emphasized my utmost faith in the Los Angeles Kings that they would do the right thing. But while the decision to return to Russia was Voynov's, instilling said initiatives has restored this writer's faith in the Kings organization.

They may find games or moments where they will miss the defensive expertise or the offensive contributions of Slava Voynov. They may also exhibit frustration when one of their younger defenseman shows his inexperience on a play which would have been better handled by the now-exiled blueliner. But for the Los Angeles Kings and their fans, the post-Voynov era adjustment is an adaptive one and whether it takes a week, a month or even a year, said struggles will prove to be a small price to pay as in the end, parting ways with Voynov will prove its substantial worth.

From the presence of star players to Stanley Cup success, there are plenty of great reasons to support the Los Angeles Kings. But while said logic is substantial, nothing can supersede the Los Angeles Kings' ability — and responsibility — to do the right thing.