

## WJC Day 4- Russia-Latvia

Written by Matt Bugg

Friday, 30 December 2011 15:02 - Last Updated Friday, 30 December 2011 20:13

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**(Yevgeni Kuznetsov was dialed in- but not until the second period. Photo courtesy IIHF)**

*DobberHockey senior prospects writer Matt Bugg is covering the 2012 World Junior Championships live from Edmonton and Calgary. He'll be posting updates throughout the week.*

Two goals, three assists. Five points. Not bad for a game's worth of work- never mind a single period.

But the most incredible thing about Yevgeni Kuznetsov's nine-point night- one off the World

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Juniors tournament record- was how easy he made it look.

Not that all or even most of the plays he made were pedestrian; however, it wasn't until Nikita Gusev found Kuznetsov with a pinpoint cross-ice pass for his second goal of the second period that the speedy center really began to impose his will on the game.

However, by the time Kuznetsov had reached seven points 40 seconds into the third period on a slick pass to Pavel Kulikov, even the Canadian fan base in attendance began to understand- and grudgingly acknowledge- that they were witnessing something special.

Kuznetsov barely left the ice to begin the final frame. However, it wasn't as though head coach Valeri Bragin was doing anything untoward; down a forward after a gruesome ankle injury suffered by Mikhail Grigorenko, Kuznetsov was moved down to the fourth line- or, rather, Kulikov and Ignat Zemchenko were moved up to play with him. The result was the first goal of the tournament for both before the third was five minutes old.

But as history came closer and closer with every shift, the allure of matching the single-game record- set by someone named Peter Forsberg- became undeniable.

"At the end I was kidding with the coach, asking him to put me in," said Kuznetsov after the game- only half-joking.

With a staggering 20 goals for and only one against, there's no question the Russian offence is in fine form. But it's important to note that Kuznetsov's nine points were his first of the tournament. Sweden- a fast, physical team with the depth to match lines- will prove to be an important test on News Year's Eve.

But for now, a place in the history books will suffice.

### **Drafted Player Grades- Russia**

#### **C Yevgeni Kuznetsov- A+**

As said, really didn't find his sea legs until well into the second- but once he did, the onslaught was on. Dominated with his speed, soft hands and perfect positioning.

#### **RW Nikita Kucherov- A**

Muffed several good chances in front, but Kucherov's bread-and-butter- playmaking- was on fine display with several feeds that rivaled those of Gusev's highlight-reel pass to Kuznetsov. Once he found his office to the side of the net and established a rhythm, was a threat each shift.

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### **C/RW Alexander Khokhlachev- B+**

Was the goat on a bad hooking penalty in the second period, but seemed to find his stride after the infraction with several good end-to-end rushes.

### **C/LW Ivan Telegin- C**

Overplayed the puck- a memorable example was an attempted backhand-forehand-backhand when a gaping five hole presented itself- early in the game when the score was still respectable, and might have been remembered for the miss had Latvia responded as they did in their first match-up. Was otherwise forgettable.

### **Drafted Player Grades- Latvia**

#### **LW Kristians Pelss- B+**

Had just one recorded shot, but along with 2011 prospect Zemsus Girgensons, found himself surrounded by three red sweaters every time he took possession. Drove the net with authority and even showed off some flashy stickhandling.