

## Flyers' Ivan Provorov cites religious beliefs for boycott of team's Pride night tribute

[Dan Gelston](#) · The Associated Press · Posted: Jan 17, 2023 10:51 PM CST | Last Updated: 8 hours ago

Flyers defenceman Ivan Provorov cited his Russian Orthodox religion as the reason he did not participate in pre-game warmups when the team wore Pride-themed jerseys and used sticks wrapped in rainbow Pride tape.

The 26-year-old Provorov boycotted the pre-game skate with his teammates before Tuesday night's game against Anaheim as Philadelphia celebrated its annual Pride night in celebration and support of the LGBTQ+ community. He played nearly 23 minutes in a 5-2 victory.

"I respect everybody's choices," Provorov said after the game. "My choice is to stay true to myself and my religion. That's all I'm going to say."

Provorov declined to answer follow-up questions about his decision.

Flyers head coach John Tortorella said Provorov "was true to himself and to his religion."

"It's one thing I respect about Provy, he's always true to himself," Tortorella said.

Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, leader of Russia's dominant religious group, sent a strong signal last March justifying his country's invasion of Ukraine — describing the conflict as part of a struggle against sin and pressure from liberal foreigners to hold "gay parades" as the price of admission to their ranks.

The jerseys and sticks were set to be auctioned off by the Flyers following the game, with proceeds going to the team's charity and its efforts to grow the game of hockey in diverse communities.

The Flyers also hosted a pre-game skate for local LGBTQ+ youth. Flyers players James van Riemsdyk and Scott Laughton have been staunch supporters of the community and launched a program in support of local LGBTQ+ youth in the greater Philadelphia area.

Laughton and van Riemsdyk met after the game with about 50 people in the LGBTQ+ community. Laughton said overall the Flyers had a "great, great night that brings a lot of awareness."

Laughton said there would be more conversations ahead with Provorov, who moved from Russia to the United States as a teenager. He signed a six-year, \$40.5-million US contract before the 2019 season and won the Barry Ashbee Trophy as the Flyers' outstanding defenceman in his rookie season, the youngest Philadelphia player to receive the honour.

"I don't hold anything against anyone," Laughton said. "It's nothing like that. It was an awesome night and I'm very happy we got a win on a night like this."

All-star forward Kevin Hayes, who had a hat trick in the win over Anaheim, said "it's not for me to answer" when asked how he felt about Provorov's decision.

The Wells Fargo Center was decorated Tuesday night in rainbow hues representing the LGBTQ+ community through special pride-themed arena LEDs, decor and rainbow-themed team merchandise.

"The Philadelphia Flyers organization is committed to inclusivity and is proud to support the LGBTQ+ community," the team said in a statement after the game. "Many of our players are active in their support of local LGBTQ+ organizations, and we were proud to host our annual Pride Night again this year. The Flyers will continue to be strong advocates for inclusivity and the LGBTQ+ community."

The NHL also champions the You Can Play Project, which aims to ensure equality, respect and safety for all athletes, without regard to sexual orientation. The NHL has never had an openly gay active player.