

Atlantis crew relaxes after wrapping up spacewalks

May 22 2010, By MARCIA DUNN , AP Aerospace Writer



In an image made from NASA TV, astronaut Michael Good participates in a spacewalk wearing a Notre Dame logo on the left arm of his space suit on Friday, May 21, 2010. Astronauts from the space shuttle Atlantis have finished putting in a new six-pack of batteries at the International Space Station on Friday, a US\$22 million power overhaul that was their last major objective. (AP Photo/NASA)

(AP) -- Atlantis' six astronauts got a little down time up in orbit Saturday on the eve of their departure from the International Space Station.

The shuttle crewmen wrapped up the third and final [spacewalk](#) of their space station visit Friday. So on Saturday, Mission Control gave them part of the day off.

They planned to indulge in their favorite pastime - gazing out the window and watching the world go by - before preparing for Sunday morning's undocking of Atlantis.

"It's like a geography lesson. It's fantastic," astronaut Piers Sellers said in an educational event.

Eighteen youngsters ranging from first to 12th grade submitted questions by video.

One boy from Virginia wanted to know why shuttle [astronauts](#) wear orange flight suits for launch and landing.

"The purple ones kind of clash with my eyes. I think I look a lot better in orange," joked Garrett Reisman. Seriously, he added, it's so rescue teams could find the astronauts more easily in case of an accident.

A bilingual Texas girl wanted to know how many languages someone needs to speak at the space station.

Station resident Tracy Caldwell Dyson said English is the official language, but noted that Russian also is essential because the Soyuz launch and landing vessels operate solely in that language. The station currently is populated by three Russians, two Americans and one from Japan.

Shuttle pilot Dominic "Tony" Antonelli explained that he and his colleagues spent eight months - an entire school year - getting ready for this mission. During their weeklong visit, they gave the space station six fresh batteries, an extra antenna and a new Russian compartment full of supplies.

Atlantis' commander, Kenneth Ham, fielded the pair of questions about

the waning shuttle program.

"Well, we're not exactly sure that this is, in fact, the last space shuttle flight of Atlantis," he said. "This was the 32nd time that Atlantis has launched into space and flown around the Earth many, many times. So we're just another crew to be lucky enough to be part of that program, and if it's the last flight, then it's truly an honor."

Ham noted that the end of the shuttle program is inevitable.

"If we as humans want to explore deeper into the universe - starting with maybe the moon, moving on to asteroids and Mars - the space shuttle is not the machine that can do it," he said.

Only two shuttle missions remain on the official roster: Discovery in September and Endeavour in November. NASA and some lawmakers are pushing for one more flight by Atlantis, in June 2011. White House approval would be needed.

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