

Tajik Police Ban Bearded Footballer

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DUSHANBE, Tajikistan — Tajik police have forced a topflight player to be banned because he has a beard, according to the coach of his team.

Khayr Vakhdat coach Tokhir Muminov said he has been unable to select Parviz Tursunov for the opening two rounds of the season while there are problems with the police over his appearance.

But the Interior Ministry denies issuing any order to prevent bearded footballers from playing and said any officers caught intimidating citizens would be punished.

Tajik authorities have taken strict measures to stamp out any signs of religious extremism, with police reportedly sometimes rounding up bearded young men.

Tursunov, a devout Muslim, said he would rather give up football than his beard.

"Football is secular, but we should think about the eternal," Tursunov said.

Khayr Vakhdat has won both games despite Tursunov's absence after beating last-place

Parvoz Bobojon Ghafurov 3-0 on Sunday.

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