

Topless Ukrainian Grabs Euro Football Cup

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Guards detaining Kovpachik with the football cup in Kiev on Saturday. **Gleb Garanich**

KIEV — A Ukrainian women's rights activist stripped to the waist and seized the Euro 2012 football trophy while it was on public display in Kiev this weekend to protest the forthcoming monthlong championship.

The young woman, Yulia Kovpachik, 23, is a member of the Kiev-based Femen women's rights group, which believes that the Euro 2012 tournament being played in Ukraine next month will encourage sex tourism.

Kovpachik strode up to the silver, 60-centimeter-high trophy, which was on display as a tourist attraction in an open-air exhibition in central Kiev, ostensibly to be photographed alongside it like hundreds of other sightseers.

But she then pulled down her red T-shirt to reveal the words "[expletive] Euro 2012" scrawled on her torso. As she grabbed hold of the cup with both hands, she was seized by security guards, who appeared to have had advanced warning of the protest.

They covered her with a sheet and took her off to a waiting police car.

The protest on Saturday appeared to be the first action in a campaign against the championship by Femen, which regularly stages bare-breast protests in Ukraine — and sometimes beyond — to highlight what it sees as political injustice, social abuse and the exploitation of women in Ukraine.

Femen says Euro 2012 — which Ukraine is co-hosting with Poland; the final will be in Kiev on July 1 — will be a magnet for sex tourists and feed a booming sex industry.

About 1 million foreign tourists are expected in Ukraine for the Euros.

Organizers said the 8-kilogram Henri Delaunay cup was undamaged, although Kovpachik appeared to topple back under its weight as security guards seized her. It was put back on display after the incident.

Femen's spokeswoman, Anna Gutsol, said Kovpachik, who staged the protest on her 23rd birthday, was released after being told she would have to appear in court Monday on a charge of hooliganism. The charge carries a maximum fine of 800 hryvna (\$100) and 15 days detention.

Conscious of Ukraine's growing reputation as a new destination for sex tourism, Euro 2012 organizers say they are taking steps to curb prostitution during the tournament.

After Kovpachik's protest, Femen activist Olexandra Shevchenko told reporters: "We came here today to stop this Euro fan lowlife from making a bordello out of Ukraine."

City authorities have mounted the trophy in a temporary exhibition area on Kiev's Independence Square.

Hundreds of sightseers were lining up under the blazing sun for souvenir photographs alongside it when Kovpachik staged her demonstration.

Independence Square itself will be the center of a huge "fan zone" during Euro 2012, capable of holding tens of thousands of football fans.

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