

UEFA Charges Russia Over Fans' Racist Abuse

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Italy forward Mario Balotelli in 2009.

UEFA has charged the Russian Football Union for racist behavior and racist chanting by Russian fans during a Euro 2012 match, a day after the union's chief quit over Russia's poor showing.

UEFA said it opened disciplinary cases for "improper conduct of their supporters (racist behavior, racist chanting)" against both the Russian Football Union and the Spanish Football Federation.

The charges follow reports that monkey noises were directed by Spain fans at Italy forward Mario Balotelli and that Russian fans targeted Czech Republic defender Theodor Gebre Selassie. Both players are black.

The European football body said its disciplinary panel would deal with the cases Thursday.

Russia and Spain will likely receive financial penalties if the cases are proved.

Russia has already been fined 185,000 euros (\$230,000) after being charged by UEFA over its fans' conduct at all three of its group-stage matches in Poland.

UEFA also threatened Russia with a six-point deduction in its 2016 European Championship qualifying group after some of its fans attacked stadium stewards in Wroclaw following the Czech match on June 8. UEFA has said the deduction would be enforced if fans repeated their violent behavior. The Russian FA has appealed that sanction.

In the first proven case of racist abuse at Euro 2012, UEFA fined Croatia's football association 80,000 euros (\$100,000) for a range of charges, including insults directed at Balotelli. Discrimination monitors appointed by UEFA reported that about 300 Croatia supporters made monkey noises at the Italy forward during a June 14 match in Poznan.

A Spanish fans' group previously reported that some Spain followers made monkey noises at Balotelli during a June 10 match in Gdansk.

Gebre Selassie, the first black player to represent the Czech national team, has told reporters that he "noticed" racist chants directed at him during his side's game with Russia. But he declined to file a complaint.

UEFA received reports from monitors supplied by FARE, a Europe-wide fans' network, and later asked Czech team officials to help provide evidence that could be used to prosecute the case.

Russia was heavily favored to advance from Group A but was eliminated as the Czechs and Greece reached the quarterfinals. On Monday, Russian Football Union president Sergei Fursenko announced his resignation during a televised meeting with President Vladimir Putin.

"Fursenko's exit was justified, taking into account our result at Euro 2012," said former Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin, who serves as chairman of Dynamo Moscow's advisory board.

But Russian Football Union honorary chief Vyacheslav Koloskov criticized Fursenko for abandoning "the sinking ship."

"I have a feeling there is more to his resignation," he said. "Just three or four days ago, Fursenko said he was looking for a new coach, meaning he had no plans to resign. Something must have happened that made him change his mind."

"I'm not going to condemn him. I was in his position myself a few years ago," Koloskov added, referring to Russia's fiasco at Euro 2004. "But I don't think it's right for him to abandon the sinking ship."

✉(AP, Reuters)

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