

Sexist Assault on Female Football Fans Doesn't Bode Well for 2018 World Cup

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Sport Minister Vitaly Mutko said that Russia expects 1 million foreign fans from different countries and backgrounds with a shared love of football, to visit Russia for the World Cup.

The female fans of Spartak Moscow who made the 800-kilometer trip to Kazan to watch their team play the host city last week were in for an unpleasant surprise.

Upon their entry into the Kazan Arena, several female fans underwent a comprehensive strip search by police, which included an order to remove their underwear. The Kazan police defended its invasive searches, saying that they had been conducted within the limits of the law and that only fans suspected of carrying contraband in the most improbable areas of their bodies had been searched.

Yekaterina Stepanova, a Spartak supporter who refused to disrobe, said that three to four police officers conducted searches on naked female fans for up to 10 minutes. Stepanova's refusal to strip caused police to detain her for an hour and a half before being allowed into the stadium.

These practices are not standard in football stadiums across Russia, although security remains a concern. Spartak's most zealous fans have forged a reputation as being rambunctious supporters of their club. They have been known to clash with law enforcement and the fans of rival teams. But sporadic and isolated hooliganism can never justify demeaning strip searches, disproportionate security measures or public belittlement.

The Russian Premier League has condemned the treatment of the Spartak's female fans in Kazan. The general director of Spartak Moscow, Roman Askhabadze, said the club had sent an official request to the Interior Ministry of Tatarstan to investigate the incident and take measures to ensure football fans are not subjected to such treatment in the future.

But the national, regional and local authorities who could reprimand those responsible for the incident have stubbornly endorsed the practices of the Kazan police. The President of Tatarstan, Rustam Minnikhanov, chose to blame the victims.

"The actions of security structures in this situation were caused by the inappropriate and defiant behavior of some football fans during previous matches played in Kazan," Minnikhanov said.

The incident at the Kazan Arena, in addition to being a sexist assault on the fans' dignity, casts yet another gray cloud over Russia's 2018 World Cup.

But Russia will make sure the sun shines over its World Cup. Like it did for the Sochi Olympic Games in February, Russia will put on a performance that will seduce foreigners at the expense of its own population.

The Sochi Games — where looming terror threats were far graver than the prospect of football stadium mischief — were praised for their efficient and noninvasive security procedures. Terror attacks were thwarted while spectators and media representatives were searched with dignity. Women were respectfully searched by security personnel of their gender.

The international community was generally pleased with how Russia's police treated foreigners in Sochi.

How Russian police treated Russians, however, was largely swept under the table. Although the lead-up to the games saw protests over Russia's human rights abuses and the treatment of the LGBT community, international outrage faded into the background of athletic prowess. Russia's treatment of its own population was forgotten.

The discrepancy between the authorities' attitude toward a Russian's rights and those of a Westerner remains staggering. The strip searches of Spartak's female fans would not have been performed on foreign women. Russia would not allow its image abroad to be tarnished by such dehumanizing treatment. The nation's behavior at the major sporting events it hosts, it seems, is for foreign eyes only.

In four years, Russia will host the world's most-watched sporting event. Sport Minister Vitaly Mutko said that the country expects 1 million foreign fans, men and women from different countries and backgrounds with a shared love of football, to visit Russia for the occasion.

Russia will handle its foreign visitors with care. As a sign of Russia's openness, foreigners will not be required to obtain Russian visas to take part in the world's largest football spectacle. The Kazan Arena will also host World Cup matches. But the world can rest assured that the lace panties of foreign female fans will stay put.

See also:

[Russian Football Commentator Calls for No 2018 World Cup in Russia](https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/08/06/sexist-assault-on-female-football-fans-doesnt-bode-well-for-2018-world-cup-a38080)

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