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Manchester City Angry Over Russian Spectators at Closed Match With Moscow's CSKA

By Gabrielle Tetrault-Farber

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CSKA Moscow's coach Leonid Slutsky, left, watching Tuesday's match.

Manchester City Football Club says it will submit a formal complaint to the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) after some 360 people attended its Champions League match against CSKA Moscow on Tuesday, despite UEFA's order banning fans from attending the match to punish CSKA for repeated racist incidents involving its fan base.

Earlier this month, UEFA ruled that CSKA would have to play all of its Champions League home group matches this season in an empty stadium, including Tuesday's match against Manchester City. The association also gave the club a 200,000 euro ($250,000) fine and forbade it from selling tickets to its fans for away games at Manchester City and Bayern Munich.

CSKA denied that the 360 people present in the stands at the Khimki Arena in the Moscow region for Tuesday's 2-2 draw were associated with the club.

"CSKA did not let any supporters into the match," Sergei Aksyonov, the club's media director, told The Moscow Times on Wednesday. "We have nothing to do with the people who were there. They were from the UEFA Champions Club, which included some of its sponsors and partners. We have nothing to do with this."

If that is true, then those UEFA spectators were undermining UEFA's own ban, while demonstrating support for the home team and waving Russian flags.

Manchester City captain Vincent Kompany said the presence of CSKA supporters was "unacceptable" and unfairly punished his club's fans.

UEFA's media and public relations office told The Moscow Times on Tuesday afternoon that it would not comment on the situation until it received the match report from officials. UEFA expects to receive this report late Tuesday or on Wednesday, the union's representative said.

Russian Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko chimed in on the situation on Wednesday, saying the country had no particular problem with racism in football, RIA Novosti reported.

"This [racism] is a global problem," Mutko said. "We are ready to fight it along with the whole world. This is not a Russian problem. It happens everywhere. Overall, this problem is not very big in Russia. There are fans who do engage in racist acts. But we are fighting against it, along with the rest of the world. We are a serious and civilized nation. There was lots of discussion about this ahead of the Olympic Games, but everyone left satisfied."

Mutko also assured that no "rights and freedoms" would be violated when Russia hosts the 2018 World Cup.

But several racist incidents in recent years have given football authorities cause for concern.

Last year, CSKA fans taunted Manchester City midfielder Yaya Toure with racist chants during a Champions League match. This season, the Russian Football Union punished clubs for their fans' racial abuse of Dynamo Moscow's Congolese defender Christopher Samba and Zenit St. Petersburg's Brazilian forward Hulk.

On Monday, UEFA released a statement saying "there is no place for racism, discrimination and intolerance in football." The association said activities promoting tolerance would take place at 40 UEFA club competitions and at 54 Euro qualifiers.

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