

Sports Minister Seeks 'Drastic' Changes After Poor Display by Russia's Football Team

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Russia's Igor Akinfeev reacts during their Euro 2016 Group G qualifying match against Austria in Vienna on Nov. 15, 2014.

Russia's sports minister, Vitaly Mutko, has promised widespread changes after coach Fabio Capello's team went down 1-0 to Austria in Saturday's Euro 2016 Group qualifier.

"No one could have been happy with the result against Austria or the way our team played," Mutko, who watched the game in Vienna from the stands, told Sport Express.

"The level of football we are playing has seen us drop into the 'middle' tier of European nations and perhaps we are even falling below this. We have fallen below 30 in the FIFA world rankings. Maybe by the end of the year, we will be below 40," he said.

"Now we need to deeply analyze and weigh up the complexity of the situation. I think this will happen within the next few days and we will announce the decisions we have come to. I am

positive that these should be drastic in their character."

Under-fire Capello, who has reportedly not been paid for five months, insisted that his team played well and blamed the loss on their poor finishing.

Russia have picked up five points from four matches and are currently third in Group G.

In seven competitive matches in 2014, Russia have only won one against Liechtenstein 4-0 in September.

"Today we have been cast back to 2005, when we had to start everything again practically from zero," Mutko said.

"This is happening on the background of a number of worrying tendencies within the development of Russian football. The youth teams are weak and are putting in poor performances. It's completely obvious that we have been going backwards recently. We are regressing."

Russia play a friendly against Hungary on Tuesday, which some believe, could well be Capello's final match in charge of the national team.

The 68-year-old, who coached England at the 2010 World Cup, took over as Russia manager in July 2012.

In January 2014, the Italian extended his contract with the Russian Football Union until the conclusion of the 2018 World Cup.

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