

Hulk Complains Russian Referee Made Racist Comments During Game

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This isn't the first time Brazilian striker Hulk has encountered racism here.

Brazilian striker Hulk, who plays for Zenit St. Petersburg, says he was racially abused by a Russian Premier League referee during a match over the weekend, international football news site Goal.com reported Monday.

The alleged incident took place during Zenit's 1-0 loss to FC Mordovia Saransk on Saturday, when Hulk approached Alexei Matyunin, the referee who was officiating the match, the website said.

Hulk reportedly touched Matyunin's shoulder to attract his attention. The match official then told Hulk not to touch him, ordered him to calm down and made a derogatory remark about the color of his skin, Goal.com cited the Zenit striker as saying.

This is not the first time Hulk — who signed a five-year contract with Zenit in 2012 and is

currently the highest paid player in the Russian Premier League with annual earnings of 7 million euros (\$8.7 million), according to Sports.ru — has faced racial abuse on the pitch.

Hulk told the Russian press in October that he had been the target of racist chants during his team's last away game against Spartak Moscow.

The Russian Football Union later confirmed that the Brazilian national had been targeted by racial abuse and banned Spartak's supporters from attending their club's next away game.

"You can always expect some kind of racist chants from the fans," Hulk said, according to Goal.com. "This is unacceptable, of course, but it is clear that fans use this tactic to infuriate the opposition's players. But a referee cannot be involved in these types of scandals."

Matyunin said he was ready to defend himself in court against Hulk's accusations, R-Sport reported Monday. The referee added he was in shock that the striker could make such claims against him.

"We both know that this never happened," Matyunin was quoted as saying by R-Sport. "Being accused of racism is very serious, it's a criminal offense. You need serious grounds and evidence. But deliberate libel is no less of a crime."

Matyunin is no stranger to scandals. In 2011, the referee was suspended for one year in part because of "obscene and nationalist" statements directed toward Albert Gadzhibekov, a defender from Russia's North Caucasian republic of Dagestan, Sport Express newspaper reported, though he later won an appeal against the ruling.

Racism has been rampant in Russian professional football in recent years. Manchester midfielder Yaya Toure, an Ivorian national, was the target of racist chanting by the fans of CSKA Moscow last October. In response to the incident, UEFA, European football's governing body, imposed a partial stadium ban for CSKA Moscow's next Champions League match. The club has been reprimanded for its fans' racist behavior three times in less than a year.

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