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Tiger, Alien, Bear to Compete for Russia's 2018 World Cup Mascot

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The 2018 FIFA World Cup logo seen at its unveiling ceremony at Moscow's Bolshoi Theater, Oct. 2014.

Ten different characters including a wolf, a bear and an alien will compete to become the official mascot of Russia's 2018 FIFA World Cup after a popular vote determined the initial selection, tournament organizers said in a statement Wednesday.

An Amur tiger, a bogatyr (a Russian folk hero), a wolf, an Amur leopard, a firebird, an alien, a cosmonaut, a cat, a bear and a robot were named the most popular emblems by 51,000 people in a monthlong online vote that ended at the end of May.

"For all FIFA World Cup fans the mascot will encapsulate our country. It should be one of the tournament's most colorful and recognizable characters. So it is really important to engage and involve Russians as much as possible in its design," Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko said in the statement published on the tournament's official website.

During the second stage of the contest, students from 50 Russian art universities will submit their designs for the mascots, with a jury then selecting the three best submissions.

At the final stage, the three designs will be put to a nationwide vote, with the official symbol of the tournament to be announced in 2016, the statement said.

Russia won the right to host the 2018 FIFA World Cup at the end of 2010. Following the ongoing armed conflict in neighboring Ukraine and the recent FIFA scandal surrounding allegations of corruption in the World Cup bids, several American and European politicians have called for the tournament to be moved to another country.

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