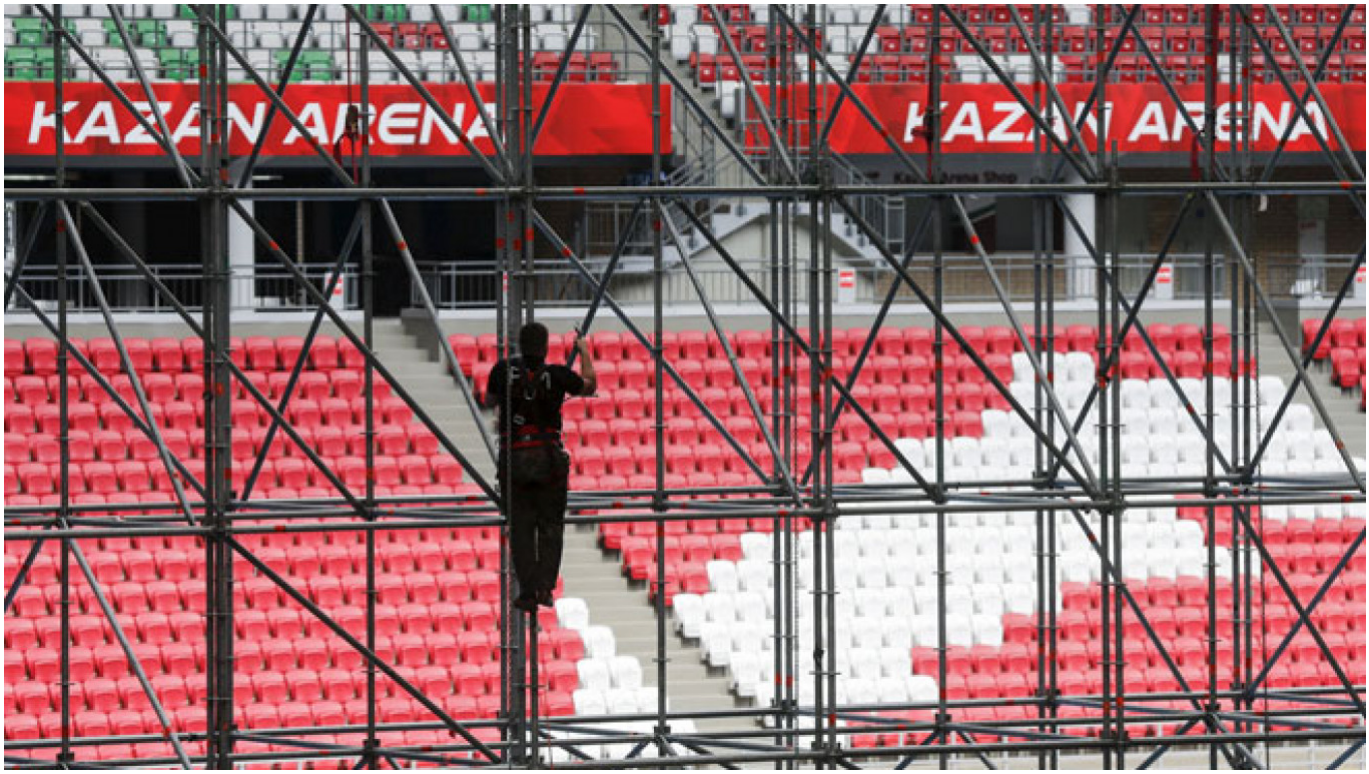
The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Kazan to Transform Football Stadium Into 2 Massive Swimming Pools

July 12, 2015



KAZAN — Diving normally results in a yellow card when it takes place inside a soccer stadium but later this month inside the Kazan Arena each downward plunge will be cheered by 30,000 fans.

That is because, for the first time ever, the world swimming and synchronized swimming championships are being staged inside a soccer stadium.

Around 300 workers are completing the construction of two temporary 50-meter pools, one being used for competitions and the other for practice.

In a clever feat of ingenuity, the inside of the Kazan Arena, one of the 12 venues in the 11 cities staging matches in soccer's World Cup in 2018, has been transformed to host FINA's world swimming championships between July 24 and August 9.

Temporary stands holding around 11,000 people, watching three daily sessions, have been built inside the impressive Kazan Arena which will accommodate around 45,000 when World Cup matches are played there in three years' time.

Ranko Tepavcevic, the secretary general of FINA's organizing committee, explained why the championships are being staged inside a football stadium when Kazan, the capital of the Tatarstan republic, already boasts an aquatic facility built for the 2013 summer Universiade, the World Student Games.

"We can get more people in here, the facilities are better, we can use the stadium's skyboxes and VIP areas, and well, we wanted to be creative," he explained while work continued in the stadium around him.

The football pitch is currently situated three meters below the bottom of the temporary pools, which the swimmers will reach by underground walkways and staircases.

The project underlines Kazan's claims to be the new sporting capital of Russia.

Having already hosted a number of continental and world championships in the last few years, Kazan will also host the semi-final of the Confederations Cup in 2017 and group matches and possibly a World Cup quarter-final a year later.

Vladimir Leonov, the Tatarstan republic's 37-year-old Minister of Youth and Sports, is hugely enthusiastic about the progress his city has made.

"If you had said 10 years ago we would be staging events like this and matches in the World Cup, people would think we were crazy," he said.

"But sport represents a new spirit in the new Russia and the passion of the people have made these dreams come true."

Vadims Andrejevs, Kazan Arena's deputy CEO, is also proud of what the stadium can offer.

"I was talking to people at Arsenal's Emirates Stadium and at Wembley recently and they told me that they had hosted some concerts and other events," he said.

"I asked them, 'but have you built two swimming pools in your stadium?' of course they hadn't.

"But we are learning all the time, we have taken the inspiration of service from Wimbledon, merchandising from Formula One. We want to set new standards like in a hotel."

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