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Volgograd Suggests Football 'Peace Match' Between Russia and Germany

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Manuel Neuer of Bayern Munich and the German national team.

VOLGOGRAD — The governor of the Russian city that was the site of one of the bloodiest battles of World War Two, wants to stage a "peace match" between the Russian and German national soccer teams in the lead-up to the 2018 World Cup.

Although there have been no formal discussions about the match taking place, Andrei Bocharov, the governor of the Volgograd region, said he would like the two nations to meet in a friendly international marking the official opening of the Victory Stadium.

"We would welcome such a match here, it would be a match of peace," Bocharov told reporters at the construction site.

"I am sure that a match such as Germany against Russia would capture the public's imagination in this city and I am sure the demand for tickets would be far greater than the capacity the stadium could hold."

One of 12 venues that will host World Cup matches in 2018, the Victory Stadium is due to be completed in late 2017, with seating for 45,000 spectators.

The new stadium will replace the now-demolished Central Stadium, the home of Rotor Volgograd, and is being built on land where the Battle of Stalingrad took place between Soviet and Nazi German troops.

During building works, the remains of two Red Army soldiers were discovered in an underground bunker and reburied with full military honors while unexploded bombs and other ordnance have been found and made safe.

"We would be happy to have the match here between Russia and Germany after the stadium is finished at the end of 2017," Bocharov said.

"The match could of course be played during the World Cup, either way it would be a match of peace.

"But if it was the opening match at the stadium, that would be a very interesting and that would be the match of peace."

There was no immediate response to Bocharov's proposal from either the German or Russian football associations but Bocharov said he would raise the idea with Russia's Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko, who would need to approve the fixture.

Germany, who won last year's World Cup in Brazil, have often played warm-up matches in countries hosting the biggest international tournaments and any match between the defending champions and hosts would be a major drawcard.

Germany and Russia have played each other just twice on Russian soil, both times in Moscow, but a game in Volgograd, formerly known as Stalingrad, would be highly symbolic.

The Battle of Stalingrad took place from August 1942 until February 1943, involving millions of troops, but was eventually reduced to hand to hand fighting in the rubble of the city that was almost totally destroyed.

"There are a lot of close ties between Germany and Russia now, but a match at this new stadium would be very special," Bocharov said.

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