The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Football Player in Russia Warns of Rampant Racism Ahead of World Cup

July 20, 2015

Zenit St. Petersburg's Hulk

Brazil and Zenit St Petersburg forward Hulk says racist comments are made by spectators at almost every match played in Russia and he fears "gross and ugly" racism could mar the 2018 World Cup finals.

Ghanaian midfielder Emmanuel Frimpong was subjected to monkey chants at a match last Friday in Russia, which hosts the 2018 finals; but Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko said the incident should not be "inflated into a big scandal."

"It (racism) happens at almost every match in Russia but the world does not hear about it because they try to keep it quiet," Hulk told reporters on Monday at a Zenit training session.

"I see it happening all the time. I used to get really angry about it but now I just send a kiss to the fans and try not to get angry."

Soccer's governing body FIFA has said it will ask the Russian Football Union to provide details

of the incident in last Friday's match between Spartak Moscow and Ufa, after which Frimpong was sent off for raising a finger to the crowd.

Hulk, whose real name is Givanildo Vieira de Souza, has also complained in the past of monkey chants and other racist abuse during matches in Russia.

Russian Showcase

"It is always sad when something like this happens but the saddest thing about what happened on Friday was that the Spartak coach did not say there was anything wrong about this," Hulk said.

Argentina international Ezequiel Garay, who also plays for the Russian Premier League champions, echoed Hulk's concern about racism in Russia.

"It's a pain. It does happen here as it does in every walk of life. But fans should respect everybody else and not let their passion create these problems," he said.

"I regard myself as black-skinned in some way but I am able to respect everyone I play against."

President Vladimir Putin wants the 2018 finals to showcase Russia as a modern state and hopes to avoid the bad press that marred the run-up to the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, which included protests about the treatment of homosexuals in Russia.

Mutko appeared to try to play down the seriousness of last Friday's incident when he told TASS news agency: "I do not think that what surrounds this episode should become inflated into a big scandal."

"We ourselves are talking too much about it," he said.

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