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Sepp Blatter Deserves the Nobel Prize, Vladimir Putin Says

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Putin and Blatter sharing a warm handshake Saturday in St. Petersburg.

Vladimir Putin and Sepp Blatter just can't stop praising each other.

The Russian president, speaking with Swiss TV on Monday, said the embattled head of FIFA deserves a Nobel Prize for his work.

Two days after Putin and Blatter hosted the preliminary draw for the 2018 World Cup, Putin said "people like Blatter ... deserve special recognition."

Blatter had opened the draw ceremony Saturday — held at a palace in St. Petersburg that is an official Putin residence — and warmly congratulated his host.

"Thank you, President Putin, you make us happy and comfortable," said Blatter, who was making his first trip outside his native Switzerland since American and Swiss investigations of corruption in soccer were revealed in May.

Besides Blatter, Putin suggested to Swiss state broadcaster RTS that heads of international

sports federations and Olympic committees would also be worthy recipients.

"Let's have Nobel Prizes for people like that," said Putin, who approved lavish spending on the 2014 Sochi Olympics that cost $51 billion to prepare and stage.

On Saturday, Blatter told Putin that the Russian people "can be proud" of him and that FIFA says "yes to Russia, we are providing our support."

Russia's successful bid to host the World Cup is central to the Swiss federal investigation. That case also focuses on the 2022 bidding campaign, won by Qatar.

The American case has named three former FIFA vice presidents among 14 soccer and marketing officials indicted in May on widespread racketeering charges. A further four men have made guilty pleas in the widening case that is also expected to target Blatter and the 2018-2022 World Cup bid contests.

Putin said in the Swiss interview, recorded Saturday in St. Petersburg, that he was sure Blatter was not corrupt. He added that, by making allegations against FIFA, the Americans and their allies in Britain were continuing to fight the World Cup bidding contest. Both the United States and Britain bid for the tournaments won by Qatar and Russia.

Blatter made a similar comment in his first interview after being re-elected president of FIFA on May 29.

Four days after the interview aired on RTS, Blatter announced he would step down within months. The new election is scheduled for Feb. 26.

Blatter has long coveted a Nobel Peace Prize for FIFA on behalf of world soccer, but the corruption cases appear finally to have ended that hope.

On June 15, the Nobel Peace Center in Norway terminated its cooperation with FIFA in a project called "Handshake for Peace." FIFA criticized the Nobel organization the next day for lacking fair play and announcing the split via the media.

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