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England Fan Apologizes After Statue Outrage

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Vasily Konov / Twitter

A British fan who was fined for defacing a football statue in Moscow has issued an apology to Russian fans following widespread outrage in the local footballing community.

The 20-year-old British national was caught on camera scrawling the word "England" on a monument to legendary Soviet footballer Fyodor Cherenkov outside the Spartak Stadium before England's match with Colombia on Tuesday.

He was later identified by the stadium's security guards and taken away from the stands in the second half of the match to be detained, the RBC news website reported.

On Wednesday, a Moscow city court issued the man a 3,000-ruble ($47) fine for violating the "rules of conduct for mass sporting events."

"The citizen took part in the court proceedings, admitted his guilt and apologized to Russia," a court spokesperson was cited as saying by RBC.

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The man later issued a video apology to Russian fans, carried by the Sport-Express outlet.

“I feel sorry. I feel embarrassed ... If I had known this would offend people, I would never have done it and I fully apologize,” he said.

“I love this country. For the two days I’ve been here, your people have been welcoming. I would never disrespect the country.”

The incident had sparked outrage among local football fans, who laud Cherenkov as one of the greatest footballers to ever play for Spartak Moscow and the Russian national team.

Cherenkov, who died in 2014, famously led Spartak to victory in two games on British soil: against Arsenal in 1982 and Aston Villa in 1983.

Some commentators feared that the graffiti could spark tensions between British and Russian fans, whose violent clashes before a Euro 2016 match in Marseille led to fears of a repeat at the World Cup in Russia.

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The stadium’s general director, Andrei Fedun, called the incident “hideous” and said he hoped the fan would be deported, Sport-Express cited him as saying.

“As a notice to British [fans]: The meaning of Cherenkov to us is the same as Bobby Charlton to you,” the head of Spartak’s press service, Leonid Trakhtenberg, wrote on Instagram, referring to the renowned Manchester United midfielder.

Meanwhile, State Duma deputy Dmitry Svishev, a member of the committee for sport and tourism, said the fan had “spit in the souls of our fans” before commending other England fans who reportedly attempted to rub the graffiti off the monument.

Another deputy, Igor Lebedev, asked fans to avoid giving too much significance to the incident.

“I don’t think that this was an organized incident with a political undertone,” he told Sport-Express.

“This is just an example of hooliganism, which can happen among the fans of any country,” he added.

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