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Russia's Only Foreign-Born Player Thanks Fans

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Maxim Shemetov / Reuters

Russia's Brazilian-born defender Mario Fernandes thanked fans for their support in an emotional Instagram post on Sunday.

"I thank God for having brought me to Russia," he wrote. "I'm thankful for the honor of defending [the country's] colors as part of the national team. I'm really very happy here," he wrote.

The 27-year-old accepted Russian citizenship in 2016 after spending four seasons at CSKA Moscow, becoming one of the best players in the Russian Premier League.

Fernandes, who was Russia's only foreign-born player in the tournament, scored a crucial goal in overtime against Croatia on Saturday, forcing the game into a penalty shootout. He was one of two players who missed a spot kick, costing Russia a ticket to the semifinals, but has nonetheless been lauded as one of the heroes of the squad.

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