

Putin Awards FIFA's Infantino State Medal for 2018 World Cup

By [Reuters](#)

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FIFA President Gianni Infantino thanked Russia on Thursday for hosting the "best World Cup ever" as President Vladimir Putin presented him with a state award for his role in making last year's tournament possible.

In a Kremlin ceremony broadcast on television, Putin thanked "all those who helped to make this dream come to life," including the head of football's global governing body.

Infantino, with the Order of Friendship medal pinned to his lapel, replied: "You welcomed the world as friends, and the world has created bonds of friendship with Russia that will last forever."

Russia's successful 2010 bid to host the 2018 tournament, which FIFA oversaw under Infantino's discredited predecessor Sepp Blatter, was marred by allegations of corruption in

the bidding process which also saw the 2022 event awarded to Qatar.

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In 2014, FIFA cleared Russian authorities of wrongdoing, though Western critics continued in the run-up to the tournament to question its safety credentials and suggest it could play into Putin's hands politically. Qatar has also been cleared of wrongdoing.

But last year's month-long event, spread across 11 cities, passed off without major security incidents and was deemed a success by players and fans.

Putin said at the time that the World Cup had helped debunk stereotypes about his country.

Blatter was honored with state awards by Germany and South Africa, which hosted the 2006 and 2010 tournaments.

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