

Ugly chants by soccer fans mar 'no to racism' week

Written by

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Oct. 29 (GIN) – African soccer stars came under a hail of racist chanting at a recent Champions League match by Russians in Moscow last week.

The incident highlighted the failure of official anti-racism efforts, particularly this week's "Football (soccer) Against Racism in Europe Action Week" organized by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA).

Jeers from the Moscow stadium upset Ivorian midfielder Yaya Toure. "We are all humans," he said. "It is not a nice feeling to go and play a football match - to bring joy to the people - and to be called a monkey or to hear monkey noises... That's what disappoints me so much."

Toure, of Manchester City of the UK, was wearing an armband that read 'no to racism.' He demanded action from the European sports body which is caught between the African complaints and denials from the Russians of any wrongdoing. "We found no racist insults from the fans," said Evgeny Giner of the Russian CSKA team. "On many occasions, especially during attacks on our goal, fans booed and whistled to put pressure on rival players — but regardless of their race... Granted, in the championship of Russia, there were times when bananas flew onto the field, which is unacceptable."

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"Our fans behave decently and are sympathetic to the request of the club to have much fewer imposed fines... Why the Ivorian player took it as being directed at him is not clear."

Under regulations put in place at the start of the season, if CSKA's supporters are found guilty of racist behavior, they could face partial closure of their grounds as the club's first offence. A second offence leads to a full stadium closure and a fine.

It remains to be seen whether UEFA will also review how Ovidiu Hategan, the Romanian referee, handled the incident. Touré complained to Hategan during the game that he was racially abused and, under the new regulations, the official should have stopped the game. Hategan, however, allowed the game to carry on.

In a separate development, this week Touré was named Goodwill Ambassador for the U.N.'s Environmental Program. He pledged to combat the illegal ivory trade that sees thousands of African elephants slaughtered each year.