

Reacting to Racist Chants

During a 2014 Russian soccer match between two Moscow teams, the Torpedo and the Dynamo, fans of the Torpedo began reciting racist chants, and Congonese-native Christopher Samba of the Dynamo responded with an “unpleasant gesture.”

This was not the first time Samba had responded to racist insults from the crowd. In January 2013, a banana was thrown at him. He threw it back into the stands and received no punishment. Samba asserted, “I want to play football and not have to listen to racial taunts.”¹

Although Samba apologized for his “unpleasant gesture,” the Russian Football Union (RFU) suspended him for two matches. The RFU explained, “We took into account what happened on the pitch and he was provoked. Therefore we decided on the lightest possible punishment.”² The RFU also punished Torpedo stadium officials who were ordered, for the upcoming match, to close the area of the stadium where the most vocal fans sit. The organization hoped this would send a message to fans that racism would not be tolerated.

However, racist chanting at soccer matches continued. For example, Spartak fans at a match in St. Petersburg made racist “monkey chants” towards a Brazilian-native Givanildo Vieira de Sousa, or the “Hulk.” In response, the RFU banned Spartak fans from attending the next home match, which was scheduled to take place in Yekaterinburg, 900 miles away.

Some might argue that, if fans continue to make racist chants, then the RFU should make further changes to address the issue, and that Samba can permissibly react with as much anger as he likes in the meantime. In contrast, others might argue that, whether or not fans continue to make racist chants, there are limits to what the RFU can do to address the issue, and there are also limits to how Samba can permissibly react to these chants.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Should athletes be held to a higher standard of behavior because they are in the public eye?
2. Does Samba have an obligation to act “professionally” in the face of racist chants? If so, does he also have an obligation to apologize for his “unpleasant gesture”? If not, what ethical limits, if any, should there be on his reactions?
3. To what extent should Samba be punished, if at all?
4. Is it fair to punish a large number of fans because of the actions of a few racist fans?

¹<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/early-lead/wp/2014/10/02/russian-soccer-fans-hurl-racist-insults-at-brazils-hulk-and-englishs-christopher-samba-this-week/>

²<http://www1.skysports.com/football/news/11095/9493520/former-qpr-defender-chris-samba-banned-by-russian-football-union-after-retaliating-to-racist-abuse>

