

## The Effect of Sanctions Against Russia on the Sporting World

On February 24, 2022, Russian military forces attacked the nation of Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> The invasion has drawn widespread criticism from across Europe and the world. In addition to condemnation, Russia has been the target of sanctions and other legal actions as punishment for what some Western leaders, including UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, say are war crimes committed by Russian forces.<sup>2</sup> One surprising area these sanctions and other legal actions have impacted is the sporting world. Among the changes made since February 24th are the exclusion of Russian teams from international competition, numerous teams and organizations severing ties with Russian sponsors, and the announcement by the Russian owner of Premier League club Chelsea that he intends to sell the club.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, multiple sporting competitions have excluded Russian clubs or the Russian national team. The Russian national soccer team had been scheduled to play Poland in a crucial World Cup qualifying match, but Poland announced after the invasion that their national squad refused to play Russia.<sup>3</sup> Following Public pressure, FIFA and UEFA, the global and European soccer governing bodies, announced that Russia will be banned from the upcoming World Cup this summer in Qatar.<sup>4</sup> UEFA also announced that Russian Club Spartak Moscow, scheduled to play German side RB Leipzig in the Europa League, a Europe-wide club soccer competition, would not be allowed to participate in the remainder of the tournament, handing Leipzig a free pass into the quarterfinals.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, the International Olympics Committee released a statement calling for Russian and Belorussian athletes and teams to be excluded from international competition until further notice.<sup>6</sup> Several prominent sporting events scheduled to occur in Russia have also been cancelled since the invasion, including a Formula 1 Race scheduled to occur in Sochi, and the Champions League final.<sup>7</sup> The Champions League, the top continental club soccer competition in Europe, will now host its final at the Stade de France in Paris.<sup>8</sup>

Economic sanctions and public pressure have forced sporting clubs and organizations across the continent to drop Russian sponsors. One significant legal action taken against Russia was the decision by almost all of Europe to ban the overflight of Russian aircraft.<sup>9</sup> Manchester United, a commercial juggernaut in the sporting world, ended its relationship with Russian flag carrier Aeroflot after these bans took effect.<sup>10</sup> Aeroflot's sponsorship of United dated back to 2013, but with Aeroflot and all other Russian carriers banned from the UK's airspace, the sponsorship no longer made business sense for United.<sup>11</sup> Russian energy company Gazprom lost

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56720589>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/03/politics/putin-war-crimes-russia-ukraine-us-what-matters/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.espn.com/soccer/fifa-world-cup/story/4605670/uefa-removes-russian-teams-from-all-competitions-following-ukraine-invasion>

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-winter-sports-6ff8a6338e968bcb2ccb3c8dc368586d>

<sup>7</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-soccer-sports-champions-league-paris-249b9dd81765c7cc4dd7a3fc4eb2547b>

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> <https://graphics.reuters.com/UKRAINE-CRISIS/AIRLINES/klpykbmrog/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cbssports.com/soccer/news/how-soccer-reacts-to-russias-ukraine-invasion-chelsea-for-sale-everton-cut-usmanov-ties-belarus-sanction/>; <https://www.manutd.com/en/news/detail/man-utd-official-club-statement-on-aeroflot>

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

at least two soccer sponsorships after the invasion.<sup>12</sup> UEFA cancelled its relationship with Gazprom, a sponsorship by the energy company worth a reported \$40 million annually.<sup>13</sup> German club Schalke 04 also cancelled its sponsorship deal with Gazprom.<sup>14</sup> This is especially notable because Gazprom was Schalke's primary sponsor; the Gazprom logo appeared on the front of Schalke's uniforms until the club's decision to walk away from the sponsorship.

In addition to targeting the Russian government and economy, Western nations have levelled sanctions on individual Russian oligarchs. One potential target of those sanctions is Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich. Abramovich purchased the club nearly 20 years ago using a portion of his questionably-sourced fortune.<sup>15</sup> Speculation has abounded since the invasion that Abramovich may be the target of sanctions.<sup>16</sup> Abramovich has promised to donate the "net proceeds" of Chelsea's sale to victims of the war in Ukraine, but it is not yet clear exactly what this will look like.<sup>17</sup> The club is expected to sell for somewhere in the neighborhood of \$2-3 billion.<sup>18</sup>

In just a few short days, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has turned the sporting world upside down. It remains to be seen how far the changes will go, but this may be just the beginning.

- *Davis Price Shugrue\**

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.cbssports.com/soccer/news/how-soccer-reacts-to-russias-ukraine-invasion-chelsea-for-sale-everton-cut-usmanov-ties-belarus-sanction/>

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.cbssports.com/soccer/news/roman-abramovich-chelsea-sale-russian-owner-says-hell-sell-club-but-it-will-not-be-fast-tracked/>

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.espn.com/soccer/chelsea-engchelsea/story/4608783/roman-abramovich-to-sell-chelsea-how-will-this-work-why-is-he-leaving-how-attractive-is-the-club>

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

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