

Champions League final referee under UEFA scrutiny for alleged links to far-right leader in Poland

AP

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GENEVA (AP) — An anti-racism group called on soccer’s top referee Thursday to distance himself from a far-right politician in Poland, and UEFA said it wanted “urgent clarification” just nine days before the Champions League final.

“A further announcement will be made (Friday), after reviewing all the evidence,” UEFA said.

Szymon Marciniak was picked last week by UEFA to referee the biggest game in club soccer between Manchester City and Inter Milan on June 10. He also handled the Argentina-France World Cup final for FIFA this season.

The Never Again group in Warsaw said Marciniak “reportedly promoted and participated in a recent event organized by a Polish far-right leader Sławomir Mentzen.”



“We are shocked and appalled by Marciniak’s public association with Mentzen and his brand of toxic far-right politics,” Never Again co-founder Rafał Pankowski said in a statement. “It is incompatible with the basic values of fair play such as equality and respect.”

Mentzen is a leader of the populist Konfederacja (Confederation) party which has been accused of promoting antisemitic, sexist and homophobic views.

Marciniak and Mentzen were billed as key speakers at an event publicized as a business conference for entrepreneurs on Monday in Katowice, Poland. Mentzen promoted the referee’s involvement on his social media channels.

UEFA said in a statement that “the whole football community abhor the ‘values’ that are promoted by the group in question and takes these allegations very seriously.”

Pankowski said Never Again called upon Marciniak “to acknowledge his mistake. If he does not do it, we believe UEFA and FIFA should draw consequences.”

Never Again later posted a statement in Polish that it said was given to them by Marciniak, in which the referee said he always distanced himself from racism, antisemitism and intolerance. The statement did not address his alleged links to Mentzen or the conference.

The 42-year-old Marciniak refereed at the 2022 and 2018 World Cups and the 2016 European Championship. He missed Euro 2020 while recovering from a heart complaint after a COVID-19 infection.

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