

FIFA Fails The 'Fair Play' Test

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Sooner or later, FIFA will have to answer the charges of favouritism and financial corruption, said Marcus Rubinstein on this evening's SBS news. Unfortunately, as things stand now, nothing could be less likely.

World Cup readers at this site earlier this year were left in no doubt of this column's distaste for football's world governing body and in particular its blatant lack of public accountability. This was evident not only in FIFA's weak acquiescence in some appalling refereeing decisions but in its clear commercial endorsement of the ludicrous vuvuzelas and Jabulani ball for blatant marketing and revenue gain. Together, these actions reduced the tournament to a farce, despite the excellence of South African staging. Why would anyone be naïve enough to think things might have changed?

Everyone from Barack Obama to Harry Redknapp (even Australian singer Damien Lovelock) has been queuing up to condemn FIFA's latest display of nepotism in the announcement of the 2018 and 2022 host nations. The UK's football league chairman, Lord Mawhinney, and English bid CEO, Andy Anson, have publicly stated that cronyism carries more weight than technical soundness. Tottenham manager, Harry Redknapp, says it simply defies credibility that a technically excellent bid like England's could receive just a single vote apart from its own. Anson has resigned in disgust saying there's now no point in further bids until voting reform is achieved since decisions are clearly made well in advance. Critical UK media reporting of FIFA appears to have drawn the consequence many feared – Sepp Blatter, FIFA President, reminded his executive colleagues immediately before the vote of “the evil of the media”, providing an imprimatur for the payback which would probably have occurred anyway.

Thus were the best three bids seen off. The USA received three votes, Australia one (voting analysis link below). Of all the rejected nations, Australia has perhaps the most reason for anger. In this column's view, on a fair field of play Australia should have been awarded the 2022 decision in a canter, on the technical excellence of its bid and the fact that its main competitors have already hosted the Cup. Sadly, Australia blotted its copybook in one fatal respect. An embarrassingly parochial short film gave the impression (as with the 2000 Olympics) that national pride and tourism were underwriting the bid, rather than mature respect for football. It paid the price, but it shouldn't have. A similar build up to the Olympics was equally irritating but the event itself ran superbly.

Instead, though, FIFA gave the tournaments to a nation where the distinction between government and organised crime is blurred to say the least; and to a nation where almost no-one lives and it's usually 50 degrees. “FIFA is taking football to the middle east”, bleated Blatter. Bollocks. Football is already well established in the Middle East, and anyway FIFA cares nothing for “taking football” anywhere. Such is the game's established global prestige that it takes itself anywhere it wants to go. What FIFA cares about, in fact, is revenue stream and control (by coercing host nations, for example, to rewrite their own laws making minor copyright misdemeanours a criminal offence – in South Africa, FIFA insisted on the creation of new criminal courts to try people who used footballs in advertising without paying Zurich a hefty fee).

On this last criterion, there are no prizes for guessing which two bidding nations would find it easiest to shelve the minor inconvenience of democracy. And on the first, Arab pockets are deep enough to finance whatever unorthodox inducements may have been sought (just ask Britain's Serious Fraud Office). As for Russia, it will always find the money for state PR. The best bids complied with and surpassed every technical requirement; but the events went to nations which fell well short but offered the biggest bucks. As nowpublic.com notes, Qatar's bid "hinged on technology that does not exist to cool stadia that are not yet built, in a nation where alcohol is illegal nearly everywhere". In Russia's case, it will be interesting to watch the logistics of transporting football fans between venues thousands of kilometres apart in a country where police action verges on the brutal. One nowpublic.com correspondent wrote "If you thought the vuvuzelas were irritating, wait till you hear the Kalashnikovs".

FIFA appears to concede its own corruption. It has suspended two board members and placed several more under question. It is unaccountable, anti-democratic and cares nothing for the game it governs. FIFA, not the media which rightly criticizes it, is the real evil. It must be disbanded and a new, elected and openly transparent body put in its place. And Sepp Blatter, whose name has disfigured sporting governance for so long, must be dismissed and made to answer for his maladministration.

"In football, you have to learn to lose", he says, conveniently missing the point that this argument is about process, not outcome. A beautiful game? Yes, but what a price we have to pay for it.

more: The Washington Post's Jeff Maurer writes "Qatar will burn an ungodly amount of fossil fuel to air condition twelve stadia, but the one thing it has is an ungodly amount of fossil fuel"; [Maurer's detailed voting analysis](#)

<http://voices.washingtonpost.com/box-seats/2010/12/world-cup-bid-voting-patterns.html>

footnote 5 1/1/11 The BBC's respected football analyst and commentator, Alan Green, called FIFA a discredited organization in his World Service end of year review, adding that Sepp Blatter would be a figure of fun if he didn't wield such power. Green said he always thought Russia would get the 2018 Cup, despite the country's corruption and the racism of its fans; but he described Qatar as "a ludicrous choice", saying Australia's bid was a good one and FIFA had by-passed the chance to open a new football stage. FIFA badly needs root and branch reform, he said, but added "I'm not holding my breath".

Green also interviewed American former FIFA delegate and university professor, Mel Brennan, who described FIFA on Dec 4 as "a galacticos of corruption". Brennan said it was time for football to do what other sports had done – "...find the will to strip down and rebuild". He said the mistake people make with FIFA is in dealing with them "as if they're a rational organization" (London Sun, dec 4 2010). "Qatar ... is about two things – petro dollars and Sepp Blatter's pursuit of a Nobel Prize". Brennan is completing a book entitled 'The Men Running and Ruining Football'.

footnote 4 15/12/10: A reader of this column in Ireland emails to say it recently took him nine hours to travel by train between Moscow and St Petersburg; "Will Jewish

people and those who have an Israeli stamp in their passport be welcome in Qatar?" he asked.

footnote3 15/12/10: *Former German captain and coach, Franz Beckenbauer, resigns from the FIFA board saying he has no confidence in its selection procedure.*

footnote 2 14/12/10: *FIFA President says same sex couples visiting Qatar for the 2022 World Cup should refrain from "sexual activity".*

footnote 1 8/12/10: *As if to confirm the full extent of its removal from reality, and the depth of its malice, FIFA today issued a statement through its vice president, Jack Warner, who said that England could not have expected to receive the 2018 World Cup after FIFA executives were "insulted" by BBC and Sunday Times investigations which led to the suspension of six senior FIFA officials including two board members (Guardian Sport). FIFA secretary-general, Jerome Valcke, claimed the voting system could not be more transparent and said FIFA would not bow to pressure to overhaul it, or expand the electorate, adding "If we [were to concede that the secret ballot system did not work} we would recognise that something went wrong".*