

The Corruption of Global Football

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2 December 2015

The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) acts at the international governing body of association football, futsal, and beach football. From a once humble start in 1904, the organization now governs the sport between 208 member countries (BBC, 2015). This includes the countries under the continental football bodies of CONMEBOL (South America) and CONCACAF (Caribbean, Central, and North America), who oversee major tournaments such as the Gold Cup and Copa America. FIFA is also responsible for the most-watched sporting event in the world, the World Cup, which generates billions of dollars in revenue between corporate sponsors, broadcasting rights, and merchandising (BBC, 2015). Over the past decade, investigative journalists and whistleblowers have linked FIFA leadership with corruption, bribery, and alleged vote rigging. These allegations have not only made them question the ethical corporate culture that FIFA has housed, but has led to an ongoing enquiry by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the United States and the indictment of fourteen people in connection with serious criminal charges, such as racketeering.

In 2006, British Investigative journalist Andrew Jennings published his book, Foul! The Secret World of FIFA: Bribes, Vote-Rigging, and Ticket Scandals, which led to the production of two television exposes about the corruption inside the organization (Jennings, 2006). Nearly a decade later, in the wake of proposed anti-corruption reforms following continued allegations, FIFA president Sepp Blatter hired U.S. attorney Micheal J. Garcia as an ethics investigator. Garcia then spent eighteen months and six million pounds to produce the three-hundred-and-fifty page Garcia Report in September 2014, which was never fully made public (Sinnott, 2015). Instead, in November, a forty-two-page summary by FIFA ethics chairman and German judge, Hans-Joachim Eckert, was published with conclusions to which Garcia

found to be “materially incomplete,” and an “erroneous representation of the facts and conclusions” (Sinnott, 2015). Joining the previous FIFA ethics investigator through similar means, Garcia eventually resigned over the matter, when his final appeal of the summary was rejected, stating, “no principled approach could justify the edits, omissions, and additions” (Sinnott, 2015). After having identified severe and wide-ranging issues with the bidding and selection process, Garcia’s exit can be seen as resistance from FIFA leadership to the wholesale corporate culture change that needed to happen, and ultimately was a step backwards for the company, who continued to head down a dangerous path.

Five months later, in May 2015, fourteen people in connection with FIFA were indicted following investigations that led to charges of fraud, racketeering, and money laundering, equivalent to that of USD\$150 million. The studies, revolving mostly around subsets CONMEBOL and CONCOCAF, and sports marketing executives who held the media and marketing rights for high-profile international competitions eventually led to the arrests of seven current FIFA officials as they were preparing to attend the 65th annual congress in Zürich (BBC, 2015). The cooperation of insider Charles Blazer, former general secretary of CONCOCAF, following his guilty plea to ten criminal charges, was crucial to the investigation, as was the use of the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act. These officials, who are expected to protect the integrity of international football by holding up the rules that keep football honest, made the game into a personal business that could help them serve themselves through monetary enrichment.

As accusations continue, FIFA’s independent ethics committee should make great strides to show the governing body as a more transparent entity. Measures, such as making investigations within the organization public and publishing the reasons for decisions, would help get FIFA back on the right track. But despite positive strides over the last year, September 2015 has been a month of new developments into the FIFA corruption cases. In a joint press conference, US prosecutors and Swiss authorities have pursued a fresh wave of arrests, which will involve both entities and individuals, after conducting wider investigations (Gibson, 2015). New evidence, such as the emergence of a 2005 contract bearing the signature of acting FIFA president Sepp Blatter, has drawn the leadership towards the epicenter of the investigation. The Swiss authorities, where FIFA houses its headquarters, have also been making new waves in the case, seizing financial assets and eleven terabytes

of digital data (Gibson, 2015). They have also taken bold steps, criticizing other jurisdictions, for in their opinion, not doing enough in these investigations. Currently, of the fourteen officials initially indicted by the FBI last year, thirteen have been arrested; three of whom have been formally charged while the other ten await extradition to the United States (BBC, 2015).

September 2015 has also seen Swiss authorities approve the extradition of the former FIFA vice-president, Eugenio Figueredo, to the United States. Figueredo, who has been accused of receiving bribes worth millions for the sale of marketing rights of the Copa America tournament to an Uruguayan sports marketing company, follows in the footsteps of former CONCACAF president, Jeffrey Webb, whose extradition was approved in May (Rashbaum and Apozzo, 2015). The same day as Figueredo's approval, FIFA Secretary General, Jerome Valcke, was suspended after accusations that he helped sell Brazil 2014 World Cup tickets on the black market for millions of dollars in profit (Gibson, 2015). This comes after his involvement in the 2008 scandal, in which Valcke allegedly transferred USD\$10 million, given by the President of the South African Football Association, Danny Jordaan, to accounts controlled by Jack Warner, then head of CONCACAF. The payment became an essential piece of the U.S. prosecutors' indictment of Warner for taking a bribe in exchange for helping secure South Africa as the 2010 FIFA World Cup host (Gibson, 2015).

So what does this mean for the future of FIFA and its president Sepp Blatter? After being reelected at the 65th congressional meeting, just days after the fourteen indictments, Blatter seemed to be attempting to ride out the storm, before announcing that he would be stepping down after the appointment of a successor just days after the vote (BBC, 2015). Ultimately he determined he was incapable of winning back popular opinion, and could not escape the mess that the organization has become under his name. The future of the 2018 and 2022 World Cup competitions is still in question as well. Although the current indictments only deal with historical corruption within the organization, none have been made in addressing forthcoming events. Moving the 2018 Russia World Cup would be a logistical challenge due to the stadiums, infrastructure, and money needed by a new host country on such short notice - although, Germany, who hosted the games in 2006, might be a viable option. Qatar is more vulnerable, seeing as the date is within the time for a revote. Despite the next host country already seeing out several corruption scandals, including a recent report dealing with the mistreatment of migrant workers, and an unprecedented move of the tournament from summer to winter, its future is not entirely set in stone as more light is being shed on the situation.

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