

Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) Background Guide

**Cleveland Council on
WORLD AFFAIRS**



Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)

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Organization History

The Federation Internationale de Football Association, or FIFA for short, was founded in 1904 to unite the various football associations present around the world. Inaugurated on May 21, 1904, the original body contained seven football associations: Belgium, Denmark, France, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. Their aim is to promote association football by organizing matches and fostering cooperation between clubs, officials, and players. To support the growth and development of the sport, they sought to establish a governing body that could oversee football and implement necessary measures, especially in wake of the increasing number of international matches played between clubs.

Countries that become a member of the FIFA group join a confederation based on their geographical location. FIFA is composed of six confederations.

- UEFA (Union of European Football Associations): UEFA governs football in Europe and parts of West Asia, overseeing 55 member nations and organizing major competitions like the European Championship, Nations League, and the Champions League.
- CONCACAF (Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football): CONCACAF oversees football in North America, Central America, the Caribbean, and parts of South America, organizing the Gold Cup and the Champions Cup (formerly the Champions League).
- CONMEBOL - The oldest continental confederation, CONMEBOL governs South American football and runs the Copa America and Copa Libertadores with just 10 member nations.
- CAF (Confederation of African Football) - Representing 56 African nations, CAF manages the Africa Cup of Nations and will benefit from increased World Cup spots under the new expanded format.
- AFC (Asian Football Confederation) - The AFC oversees football across Asia and Australia, with competitions like the AFC Champions League and the AFC Asian Cup, and includes Saudi Arabia, host of the 2034 World Cup.
- OFC (Oceania Football Confederation) - Focused on Oceania and the Pacific, the OFC remains the smallest confederation; calls to merge it with the AFC have been made, especially after Australia moved to the AFC.

Introduction

Football has developed from a sport into a global industry. FIFA has developed from a small European coalition focused on regulating international fixtures to a global industry, reaching almost every part of the world. FIFA has helped football unite cultures and has provided the opportunity for people to pursue the sport as a viable lifestyle.

This has come at a cost, however. The number of games in a calendar season continues to increase, pushing players to mental and physical breaking points. Furthermore, FIFA's strict stance on political expression often walks a fine line between maintaining neutrality and curtailing free speech. Finally, the legacy of corruption continues to haunt the organization, raising questions about fairness, transparency and the impact money has on the game.

The committee will not only confront the practical challenges of scheduling and regulation but also weigh the ethical responsibilities FIFA holds to players and fans. Delegates will explore the trade-offs between inclusivity and competitiveness, commercial growth and player welfare and neutrality and advocacy. FIFA's role is not only managing the current state of football, but it also has to shape the future of the world's game.

I. The number of games played in a calendar year

Like many other major sports, football has a set period in the calendar when the matches are conducted. The leagues in Europe start in August (with the exact date depending on the place itself) and end in May. Each team plays every other team in the league exactly twice. Thus, the total number of matches depends on the number of teams in the league. For example, England's Premier League has 20 teams with a team playing 38 matches (two games against the 19 other teams) whereas the Bundesliga in Germany has 18 teams and thus 34 matches per team. In South America, this is different with the Argentina Primera Liga lasting throughout the calendar year (from January to December) where each team plays 28 matches split across two phases.

Alongside the league, teams also participate in a structured knockout tournament with the chance of winning a trophy. The additional trophy provides more opportunities for competition by allowing teams of various levels to compete for the chance to win more silverware. Matches from these tournaments are distributed across the calendar with all teams participating but the results of the match are not added to their record in the league. However, this results in a team playing more games in the set period of time. More frequently than not, some of the teams have to reschedule their existing league matches in order to accommodate the knockout matches.

The league games and the knockout games are usually played over the weekend to maximize viewership as well as allow recovery for the players throughout the week, with some games played at the middle of the week. This becomes a more frequent occurrence if a team qualifies for any of the continental championships that are hosted by a confederation. If this is the case, then the team would participate in another structured knockout tournament, this time with other teams across the continent. One example of this is the Copa Libertadores, the premier club competition in South America. 32 teams can qualify for the tournament in one of three ways: win their respective league, win a domestic trophy, or end the season in a set spot with the opportunity to qualify for the tournament.

Adding up all the matches played across these formats, if a team were to find themselves in a club competition, they would be playing upwards of 50 games per season. However, players not only have to play at a club level but also at an international level. National associations recruit squads of players to represent them at a national level, either at scheduled friendly matches or continental/international competitions, increasing the number of possible games to around 70. One example of a football player playing these many games is former Manchester City striker Julian Alvarez in the 2023/24 season, where he participated in 54 games for his club, Manchester City, and 23 for his country, Argentina, totaling to 77 games played from August 2023 to July 2024, leaving him with less than a month's break before the 2024/25 season.

Top stars now face the possibility of playing a larger number of games due to the recent number of modifications FIFA have made to the formats of their competitions. The most controversial ones come from UEFA, where they redesigned the league stage of the Champions, Europa, and Conference League tournaments. The prior design was the classical double round robin format where the 32 teams that qualified for the tournament were split into 8 groups of 4, with each team playing the other 3 teams in the group twice (leading to a total of 6 games). The top two teams based on points (and if drawn, based on goal difference) advance to the round of 16 which transitions back to a classic knockout tournament. The third-place team in the group drops down to the Europa League. For the recent 24/25 season, UEFA decided to move away from the double round robin in favor of a league format. 36 teams will be able to participate in this league format as opposed to the previous 32, giving 4 additional teams the opportunity to battle for prestige on a European level. However, instead of each team playing 6 games against three different teams, they will be playing 8 games against 8 separate teams (4 of which will be played at home, and 4 of which will be played away). To determine the eight opponents, all 36 teams will be split into 4 pots that are determined based on the club performance. Each team faces 2 teams from each pot. Similar to the previous format, 16 teams can qualify for the next round. The mechanics are different, with the top 8 teams of the group stage having direct access to the knockout rounds (seeded 1 to 8). The teams placed 9 - 24 duke it out for the remaining 8 spots (with 9th place playing 24, 10th playing 23rd and etc). Each match will be played twice (home and away) and the winner advances being seeded 9-16 to face 1-8. Unlike the previous

format, any team lower than 24th will be eliminated from any form of UEFA competition for the remainder of the season. This increases the possible number of games played in the group stage from 6 to 10 (8 league games + 2 playoff games depending on seeding), with the group stage going on until January as opposed to ending in December. The main advantage of the new Champions League is the increased variety of matches that can be played. Not only can more teams participate, but the pot distribution also increases the possibility of matchups between footballing giants. These two factors catalyze the increase in revenue that UEFA predicts from this format change. The clubs also benefit from this with the total distribution pot of the Champions League increasing by almost \$660 million, all of which is distributed to the clubs based on performance.

While UEFA has moved away from the double robin group stage, FIFA continues to embrace it in the FIFA Club World Cup, which expanded in its latest iteration to include 32 teams from various continents and was played this past summer in North America. Instead of over the winter, FIFA determined that the Club World Cup be played over the summer as a prelude to the 2026 World Cup (which is played between countries instead of club). This was immediately met with controversy, with the World Leagues Forum (a conglomerate of the various footballing leagues) writing a strongly worded letter to FIFA complaining about the minimal consultation with the leagues when it came to establishing the new Club World Cup. Specifically, it accused FIFA of ignoring the interests of national competitions as well as overloading the calendar and considering its own monetary interests over the welfare of the game. This came at a time when the European Court of Justice ruled that UEFA and FIFA were unlawfully blocking the formation of the European Super League (a breakaway competition amongst top footballing associations) and thus were in violation of Europe's competition laws and added to the general frustration against UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin's inaction.

Separately, the European Leagues Organization issued its own complaint against FIFA on competition ground laws accusing FIFA of the aforementioned lack of consideration of national leagues as well as player unions when it came to determining the fixture schedule. FIFA has not been silent in its response, firstly accusing the European Leagues Organization of preserving its own self-interest, putting their own priorities ahead of the rest of the world. Secondly, FIFA argued that they substituted the confederations cup (typically played between the winners of each continental tournament) with the intention of preserving player health by guaranteeing three days of rest between each match in the Club World Cup.

While most players have expressed their vocal dissatisfaction with the Club World Cup, there is a group of players that have argued in favor of this format. Seattle Sounders player Cristian Roldan stated that "to have a chance to compete at this level is something we have always dreamed of". His team ultimately got to play against some of the world's top teams such as France's PSG, Spain's Atletico Madrid, and Brazil's Botafogo. He is backed up by former

superstar and Al-Hilal player Neymar Jr, who expressed interest in participating in the Club World Cup. Perhaps the greatest benefactor of the Club World Cup was amateur football team Auckland City FC. They had the opportunity to play against Germany's Bayern Munich, Portugal's Benfica, and Argentina's Boca Juniors (all top teams in their respective leagues). When talking about it, Ryan De Vries mentioned that "what FIFA is doing is unreal and is going to benefit a lot of teams".

This does not solely apply to clubs, with FIFA expanding the format for the 2026 World Cup to include 16 more teams (expanding from 32 to 48). Of this, 46 teams are eligible to qualify for the competition directly while 2 teams can qualify through a series of intercontinental playoff matches. The primary benefactors of this increase were Asia and Africa, who both received 4 extra spots (increasing the number of possible participants from 4 and 5 to 8 and 9, respectively, with the chance of more). Europe and North America gained 3 extra spots, increasing their count to 6 and 13, respectively, with South America receiving 2 more to have 6 spots. Oceania is also notably a very big benefactor, receiving a spot for itself. This diversity has proven to be effective with Jordan and Uzbekistan qualifying for the competition for the first time ever, and New Zealand qualifying only for the third time ever. To cope with the logistical challenges of hosting a larger volume of games, FIFA has chosen to split the hosting of games between 3 countries as opposed to 1, enabling revenue generation for more countries.

European superstars remain the largest critics when it comes to FIFA expanding their tournaments. They are required to maintain their fitness for a larger number of games, thus taking a toll on their general physical health. Erling Haaland compared the possible effect to that of player performance in the previous European Football Championship in 2024, mentioning that a lot of the players, as well as fans, were tired of football. He continued to say that the season will echo that same effect. Fellow Manchester City player Rodri has also been very vocal about the unending number of matches to be played. He also demanded that FIFA should be taking better care of its players and that Rodri himself was reaching a breaking point. In a cruel twist of irony, Rodri's season was cut short due to an injury to his anterior cruciate ligament and meniscus.

Rodri is not the only one to suffer such an injury. A study commissioned by UEFA analyzing 54 teams across 20 countries found that as the fixture list became more congested, the amount of hamstring injuries also increased. Between 2001-02, 12% of all injuries were hamstring injuries. This number doubled to 24% by the 2021-22 season. In terms of individual clubs, Manchester United is an example of the effects of a high workload. They suffered 45 injuries in the 2023-24 season, losing 1620 days to injury cumulatively. In a similar vein, Tottenham Hotspur had 41 injuries this past season, losing 1553 days. The workload extends to fatigue displayed on the pitch as well. English stars Jude Bellingham and Harry Kane defended their subpar performances on the pitch at the 2024 European Championship by citing physical

exhaustion. It has come to a point where other players have purposely prioritized club competition over national competitions, sometimes asking not to be included in squads due to exhaustion. As a result, there is another victim of the increased number of games: the fans.

Club managers have tried to combat the issue of games by resting or limiting minutes of important players during matches that they consider unimportant. For a fan travelling in the hopes of seeing this player, it may be disheartening if they end up playing only 5 minutes or worse, having the substitution bib on for the full 90 minutes. Alternatively, the high volume of games dilutes the quality and authenticity. With minimal waiting time between seasons (and even matches), fans cannot share the same anticipation that other sporting fans have for the start or end of a season because it all becomes one big blur.

II. Political Expression in FIFA

Political expression has always been an integral part of sports. An iconic example of this is Tommie Smith and John Carlos' stand against racism in the 1968 Olympics. In a more recent context, in 2014, the NBA underwent a mass movement to kick Donald Sterling out of the league with players and managers, past and present, vocally expressing their distaste for the owner of the San Diego (now Los Angeles) Clippers. Football has consistently seen moments of political expression, most notably players in the English Premier League taking a knee before every match to highlight their commitment to the battle against racism. On a global scale, things are muter with FIFA being conservative when it comes to political activism.

The most explicit rule on political expression is in FIFA's Laws of the Game, specifically Law 4 which states that "the basic compulsory equipment must not have any political, religious, or personal slogans, statements or images. The team of a player whose basic equipment has political, religious or personal slogans, statements or images will be sanctioned by the competition organizer or by FIFA". This, by extension, applies to the undergarments that a football player may wear, including times when a player may remove their jersey to reveal an underlying message.

While FIFA is clear on what constitutes political expression, the sanctions they have imposed have been confusing at times. The FIFA Disciplinary Committee increases the scope of authority from messages on clothing to behavior during a competition. For example, clause 53 states that a player or official publicly inciting others to engage in hatred or violence during a match will be sanctioned with match suspensions for at least 12 months and fined 12000 CHF (~15000 USD). If this is conducted on digital media, the fine can increase up to 2000 CHF (25000 USD). The next article is focused on the provocation of the general public, with the punishments being a 2-match ban as well as a 6000 USD fine. The clause that could be

associated with political expression the most is clause 58 which states that anyone who publicly disparages, discriminates against, or denigrates someone in a defamatory manner will be suspended for at least 5 matches at every level. This comes with a 25000 - 37000 USD penalty depending on whether it is a player or official. Spectators that do the same thing may find themselves banned from the stadium for a certain period of time, with the football team they support being forced to pay a fine. These rules have been enforced consistently, with the sanctions varying in how harsh they are.

In 1997, Liverpool striker Robbie Fowler was fined 1400 USD for wearing an undergarment that contained a political expression, expressing his support for dock workers that had been unfairly dismissed from their jobs. During a 1997 Cup Winners Cup (an annual competition in which every team that won a domestic trophy participated), Fowler scored a goal and then lifted his shirt to reveal the message. Unlike FIFA, UEFA was a lot more sympathetic towards Fowler due to the cause he was lobbying for, posting a statement commending his commitment towards fighting for workers' rights but strictly ruling that the field was not the place to engage in political activism.

An example of a more stringent punishment is Croatian defender Josip Simunic's 10 match ban that cost him the opportunity to represent his country in the 2014 World Cup. After a qualifying match against Iceland, Simunic took a microphone and went in front of the crowd shouting "za dom" (loosely translating to "for the motherland") with the crowd replying "spremni" (ready). These chants are associated with the fascist Ustase regime that ruled over Croatia during the Second World War. While Croatian litigators fined Simunic \$4,400 USD, FIFA also felt compelled to take action that not only resulted in the lengthy suspension but also the banning of Simunic's presence in the various arenas where the World Cup games were held, on top of the \$33,000 USD he had to pay.

FIFA's oversight on political expression is not only targeted at individuals. The Argentinian Football Organization was fined \$30,000 USD after members of the team posed with a banner that claimed ownership of the Falklands to Argentina in 2014 amidst heightened tensions over the same issue. Even less overtly radical messages also get flagged, as the Qatar Football Federation was fined \$52,000 for wearing t-shirts of the country's Emir during warm up practice against South Korea at a time when Qatar was in a dispute with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE.

On the surface, the consistency with regards to punishing political messages on the field may be commendable, but further scrutiny suggests that FIFA may be too aggressive, sometimes banning harmless if not profound messages. An example of the latter is the set of punishments that FIFA gave to the England, Ireland, Scotland and North Ireland Football Associations due to their donning of poppies on Armistice Day in remembrance of the Great War. Similar to the

statement that UEFA posted on the Robbie Fowler fine, FIFA also issued a juxtapositional statement claiming to fully respect the commemorations but stressing that the rules need to be equally implemented and that the display of political or religious symbols is strictly prohibited. With England and Scotland appealing the decision, it suggested the sentiment that FIFA did not care for the political message itself. Sports Minister Crouch insisted that the poppy was not a political message but was a symbol of remembrance for the people who gave their lives to the war, and that it should be worn with pride for their sake. The Ireland FA was further punished when FIFA opened disciplinary proceedings against them for wearing an Easter Rising (the earliest Irish independence movement) symbol on their uniform to commemorate the centennial anniversary of the uprising. Such criticism has motivated FIFA to modify the ban that it has imposed to allow “permitted slogans, statements or images” if the opposing team and competition organizers allow it.

Despite these changes, FIFA’s law remains open to interpretation in one key aspect: what is considered ‘political’? The political atmosphere in the modern era is dynamic, and the diversity of the players is a microcosm of the political messages that can be echoed at a large scale. FIFA have restricted their political expression (and by extension, sloganeering) to official campaigns with a notable one being UEFA’s anti-discrimination “RESPECT” campaign. Sometimes, this acknowledgement comes in the form of not punishing activism on the pitch or even going so far as to endorse it. George Floyd’s death motivated players across the world to take a stance, with many Bundesliga players displaying slogans in support of the protest. Players in the Premier League took a knee before games and wore armbands donned with the slogan ‘Black Lives Matter’. What would normally result in a fine was instead met with praise from FIFA as well as the footballing authorities, with President Gianni Infantino stating that the players deserve applause and not punishment. This sustained energy was not carried into the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, with FIFA banning players from wearing the “One Love” armband, a symbol for advocating the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. Ironically, when the German football team protested this by posing for a photo shoot covering their mouth with their hand, FIFA did not take any action. Similarly, when the Norwegian football team protested against worker exploitation during the construction of the stadiums in Qatar, FIFA issued a statement in support of Norway saying that “FIFA believes in the freedom of speech and in the power of football as good,” with no disciplinary investigation.

FIFA also has the jurisdiction to restrict countries from participating in FIFA-hosted tournaments and has majorly used this in a political context. The most recent example is FIFA’s ban of all Russian club and national teams ‘until further notice’ as a result of its actions against Ukraine. FIFA were already under pressure from various European national teams that had refused to play against Russia. In a historical context, FIFA banned South Africa in 1961 due to its rampant apartheid and requirement to send an ‘all-white’ team to participate in any competition there. This was later removed in the 1990s, with South Africa going on to host the

World Cup in 2010. This has not been consistent, however, with FIFA not batting an eye when it came to some countries. Two notable examples are the participation of Germany in the 1938 World Cup and the hosting of the 1978 World Cup in Argentina, which had just been the victim of a coup in 1976. The final was held minutes away from a detention center, with the inmates able to hear the sounds from the stadium, a harsh reminder of the duality that existed at the time. Considering the current atmosphere, experts have noted that banning countries from participating in a competition sets a difficult precedent to follow due to how unevenly it may be implemented, since numerous countries engage in politically problematic behavior.

Regardless of sport, political activism has always been a complex topic to address. Especially in contemporary society, FIFA's task of regulating action with regards to politics becomes increasingly difficult. What may seem like a binary answer is a lot more complicated. While the players and teams may feel passionate or advocate for a certain issue, it is still FIFA's responsibility to ensure that the game is a viable commercial product. The committee must find a balance between both.

III. Corruption in FIFA

Regardless of the sport, every sporting authority has come under the radar with corruption accusations, through actions that may benefit a certain player or entity, be it directly affecting the game (via purposefully incorrect actions) or indirectly (obtaining a higher position by buying the votes). As FIFA's influence on football grew, so did the possibility of committing corruption, and by extension the frequency of scandals that the organization found itself in.

The first notable incident occurred with FIFA's closely related International Sports and Leisure (ISL) company. Established in Switzerland by the son of Adidas founder Horst Dassler as a breakaway company from a different sports marketing firm, ISL specialized specifically in generating revenue and monetizing FIFA by convincing large sponsors to back the organization. Coca-Cola was the first company to do so before McDonald's and Levi Strauss followed suit. Dassler expanded the ISL by purchasing broadcasting rights for games from FIFA. Ultimately, the company filed for bankruptcy a few years after Dassler's death. They had accumulated debt after signing large contracts with various sporting organizations ranging from football clubs to the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) and ultimately did not contain the liquid assets required to pay the debts. Due to their close connection, ISL was accused of making illicit transactions to FIFA officials. Prior to the 2002 World Cup Finals in Japan and South Korea, former FIFA secretary Michel Zen-Ruffinen drafted a report that accused former FIFA president Sepp Blatter of misleading account practices such as making major financial decisions without authorization, artificially inflating FIFA revenue by including sponsorship income that hadn't been received and the financial losses that ISL had. While many officials demanded the

president's immediate resignation, Blatter was instead asked to write a written explanation behind the charges that Ruffinen introduced. Blatter denied all the charges, accusing Zen-Ruffinen of being manipulated by Blatter's political opponents and that it was a move to derail the presidency just weeks prior to the 2002 FIFA presidential election. Blatter further insisted that FIFA's financial situation was sound (which later investigations would contradict). Ultimately, the committee decided not to pursue criminal charges and Ruffinen was fired from his position.

The accusations motivated Swiss prosecutors to conduct an investigation regarding the dealings between ISL and FIFA, which concluded in 2008 with six former ISL executives being accused of fraud, embezzlement, and falsifying documents. The trial that ensued also revealed a list of sporting officials that had received a sum of \$12 million via offshore accounts based in Liechtenstein between 1999 and 2001. Prior to that, one of the defendants in the trial confessed to transferring \$76 million between 1989 and 1999. Ultimately the trial was closed with no further action being taken due to the leniency of Swiss laws with regards to corruption.

Former FIFA president Blatter's reign was filled with many more instances of corruption. In 2011, the FBI developed a case against CONCACAF general secretary Chuck Blazer on counts of fraud, money laundering, and tax evasion. To avoid punishment, Blazer entered a guilty plea that established him as a mole to flush out corruption within the organization. Blazer revealed that during several executive meetings, the FIFA Code of Ethics was broken when officials paid people in return for their vote for presidency. This was later corroborated by the Bahamian and Surinamese Football Associations, who confirmed that they received a forty-thousand-dollar incentive to vote for a particular person. In the end, all four officials involved were suspended.

The biggest case of corruption occurred in 2015, when US federal prosecutors indicted 14 officials for wire fraud, racketeering, and money laundering, centered around the collusion between the CONMEBOL, CONCACAF and sports marketing executives. The allegations involved 150 million USD being used for the issuing of media and marketing rights, with 110 million USD given as bribes in conjunction with the 100th anniversary of the Copa America (to be held in 2016). The US court suggested that the bribery was used to influence clothing sponsorship contacts, with Nike being one of the companies paying 40 million USD to be the sole issuer of equipment for the Brazilian national football team. In light of this, reports also came out that, in 2008, the president of the South African Football Association, Danny Jordaan, paid 10 million USD to Director of Marketing Jerome Valcketo via accounts under the control of Jack Warner, the CONCACAF president, which was used to help South Africa secure the hosting rights of the 2010 World Cup. This put further scrutiny on the bidding processes that landed Russia and Qatar the hosting rights for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups, respectively. Former official Phaedra Al-Majid, who was a part of the successful Qatar bid, came out as a

whistleblower claiming that Qatar paid 1.5 million USD to CAF president Issa Hayatou, Ivory Coast representative Jacques Anouma, and Nigerian official Amos Adanu in order to buy their votes for Qatar's bid. All three named people denied these claims. The primary reason behind the scrutiny was Qatar's logistical incapability to host the World Cup as they had to construct the stadium from the ground up, frequently compromising and exploiting migrant worker rights. Russia's successful bid for the 2018 world cup was also investigated for corruption, a lack of transparency and suspicious behavior. Russian officials admitted that the computers used to send the bid were rented, and thus were returned and destroyed, making it impossible to access internal communication to investigate the bid. Alongside that, meetings between Russian officials and key FIFA voters were held but not properly documented, suggesting high involvement from ranking officials such as President Putin himself pushing for Russia's bid to win.

In wake of the accusations, FIFA appointed attorney Michael Garcia to investigate the process and decisions made to decide the world cup hosts. Ultimately, his report was privately submitted to judge Hans Joachim Eckert, who released a 42-page summary that cleared both countries of any wrongdoing. This was immediately met with claims that the report was a coverup. Garcia himself claimed that the 42-page summary was not an accurate portrayal of his own report and tried to appeal the release. This was not approved as FIFA claimed that the summary was not legally binding. Garcia resigned, stating that he had lost faith in the system. Ultimately, the report was released after a German news outlet threatened to leak the contents regardless. The report was also inconsequential, with Garcia stating that some actions toed the line, but there was nothing that could be confirmed as criminal. In the end, President Sepp Blatter was forced to resign from what can only be described as a presidency filled with corruption. His successor, Gianni Infantino, has seen much more success in terms of mitigating the corruption that has occurred on the international level.

On the club level, corruption has evolved from influencing the logistics of a match or tournament to influencing the outcomes directly. The Infantino presidency has introduced two pipelines through which football clubs can engage in corruption to benefit themselves: direct influence by paying the referees, as well as financial corruption and the inclusion of state ownership to enable clubs to spend exorbitant amounts to recruit many world class players. To combat irresponsible spending and promote long-term financial health, UEFA introduced the Financial Sustainability Regulations (FSR)—more commonly referred to by its previous name, Financial Fair Play (FFP). These regulations aim to ensure that clubs spend within their means, reducing the risk of financial collapse. Under the FSR, clubs are required to break even over a three-year period, meaning their football-related expenses must not exceed their income during that time. The primary costs considered under this regulation include player wages, transfer fees, and agent commissions. However, certain investments—such as spending on infrastructure, training facilities, youth development, and women's football—are exempt from these limits to

encourage long-term growth and development. To improve financial control, UEFA has also introduced a squad cost ratio, which currently limits clubs to spending 80% of their total revenue on player wages and transfer-related costs. This threshold is set to decrease to 70% in the upcoming season, promoting more sustainable squad-building strategies.

Additionally, to prevent clubs from inflating their income, sponsorship deals are assessed for legitimacy by comparing them to market benchmarks. All relevant financial transactions must be reported to UEFA for compliance monitoring.

In 2006, the top two divisions of Italian football (the Serie A and Serie B) became the center of controversy when phone conversations revealed top club executives attempting to select favorable referees to influence the outcome of a match in the club's favor. AC Milan, Fiorentina and Lazio were embroiled but Juventus was the face of the issue. Then-manager Luciano Moggi and chairman Antonio Giraudo allegedly detained the referees after a loss at Reggina in 2004, scolding them for not favoring the Juventus squad. This extended to a continental level with Italian newspapers posting wiretaps of Moggi attempting to pressure the UEFA refereeing commission to select favorable referees, as well as calls to Interior Minister Giseuppe Pisanu to coerce him into organizing games despite the chance of the passing of terminally ill Pope John Paul the second. After an investigation in 2006, Juventus were stripped of their 2004-05 ("not classified") and 2005-06 (awarded to Inter Milan) titles. They were subsequently placed last in 2005-06 and relegated to Serie B. Fiorentina and Lazio were also relegated but they successfully appealed the decisions. This severely affected the reputation of Italian football with the average number of spectators decreasing to below 25,000 per match, a record low. For Juventus, their star players immediately departed the club. While Juventus were able to come back and even dominate Serie A in the 2010s, the incident (dubbed *Calciopoli*) remains as a perennial asterisk. Calciopoli was healthy for the long-term development of Italian football as it brought some much needed change in the refereeing system, with hirings becoming more transparent and general consciousness regarding corruption increasing.

Currently, FC Barcelona is being investigated for paying 7.8 million dollars to a company owned by the Vice President of the Spanish Refereeing Association, Jose Maria Enriquez Negreira. Several Spanish news outlets leaked quotes from Negreira's testimony to the tax authorities, in which he claimed that Barcelona paid him to ensure that no decisions were made against the club. Barcelona acknowledged that these payments were made, but stated they were legal, as Negreira was hired as an external consultant to provide reports related to professional refereeing. The club was formally charged with sporting corruption, breach of trust, and the falsification of business records. An attempt was made to charge them for bribery but to no avail, as Barcelona's organizational hierarchy could no longer be investigated. Spanish football authorities reacted negatively to the news, with La Liga President Javier Tebas stating that the intent to recruit referees itself could be subject to punishment, although it is difficult to take action on the same as the last payment was conducted 6 years ago, with the statute of limitations

ending 3 years ago. UEFA are also monitoring the situation closely, with President Ceferin stating that if anyone is found guilty, swift punishment is necessary. The case became even more of a hot topic when Barcelona's rivals, Real Madrid, decided to join the case as a damaged party. Both sides stoked media debate by bringing up historical biases present in the Francisco Franco Regime. This debate has had a negative impact on the referees, with many fans of both sides questioning the legitimacy of each decision that the referee makes. Prior to the Copa Del Rey final against Barcelona, Real Madrid's Club TV went so far as to release a lowlight of referee Ricardo de Burgos Bengoetxea. When asked about it in an interview later, Bengoetxea became emotional stating that his children at school were getting abused, with other children calling him a 'thief' and that it was negatively impacting his personal life.

Outside of paying referees, teams can pay to influence matchups by recruiting several top players to the club to ensure they have the highest advantage of winning. The lack of a salary cap is the primary reason behind the gap being so high between top and bottom teams, as well as the creation of dynasties. One such dynasty that came to a halt this year was Manchester City's ("City") grip on the Premier League starting in 2018, where they won 6 out of the last 8 premier league titles, as well as completing a three-peat by winning the FA Cup and Champions League in the 2022-23 season. This dynasty has come with its fair share of asterisks primarily due to the amount of money they have spent on purchasing players, spending almost \$2 billion on players over the past 10 seasons. The German newspaper outlet Der Spiegel leaked documents in November 2018 that City had inflated the value of a sponsorship deal that they received, misleading UEFA. This prompted UEFA's Club Financial Control Body (CFCB) to investigate this matter, with City refusing to cooperate. Ultimately CFCB declared that City had given a higher sponsorship value on its accounts between 2012 and 2016. In February 2020, UEFA banned City from participating in the upcoming 2021-22 Champions League season due to breaches in financial regulation. City was unhappy with the ruling and thus appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sports (CAS), claiming that the process was unlawful and prejudiced. The CAS were sympathetic to this and overturned the ban. City is still under scrutiny from the Premier League, who charged them with 130 counts of breaking Financial Fair Play between 2009 and 2018.

The primary reason Manchester City receive scrutiny for their lack of fair play practice is the source of their money. The Abu Dhabi United Group, headed by UAE Vice President Sheikh Mansour, enabled the club to invest significantly more money compared to other teams, which diminished the competitiveness in English Football. the parity and competitiveness in English football. Another club that was guilty of this was Paris Saint-Germain, who are owned by the Qatar Sports Investment. They broke the record for the highest transfer fee for a player when they got Neymar from Barcelona for \$262 million, as well as getting Kylian Mbappe a year earlier for over \$132 million. More recently, they signed free agents Lionel Messi and Sergio Ramos, assembling a "super team" that was able to dominate the French league. This came at a

cost, however, with UEFA fining them \$11 million with the possibility of increasing if PSG continued to break Financial Fair Play.

When comparing the possible penalties to the amount of revenue generated by clubs such as Manchester City and PSG, they are negligible and fail to restore the competitive balance within football. It has only motivated other clubs to secure their own source of funding. The most notable additions are the Saudi Public Investment Fund funding four clubs in the Saudi League, as well as Newcastle in the Premier League and American investment group BlueCo taking over Chelsea and Strasbourg. With the revenue gap increasing even further, the bigger clubs can poach talent from smaller clubs, with players going not for the allure of playing in a particular atmosphere, but because of the money. Thus, players choose to sacrifice the quality of football they play. This has also greatly shifted the center of football to being based in Europe, with talented young players moving in a mass exodus. South America is a victim of this, with promising young players choosing to play outside of their own country, which affects their domestic league and indirectly, their revenue.

In conclusion, FIFA needs to answer one question: why is this happening? Why was the Blatter presidency filled with so many cases of corruption on an international level, and why has the succeeding presidency failed to quell it on a local level? What can FIFA do to level the playing field once again and make sure the big clubs pay fair to let the smaller clubs have a chance? Since money is the name of the game, what are clubs willing to do to maximize their revenue?

Character Bios

Gianno Infantino

Gianni Infantino is the current President of FIFA and is a member of the International Olympic Committee. He has a law degree using which he became director of UEFA's legal affairs and club licensing division in 2004. In 2007 he was promoted to Deputy General Secretary and then General Secretary 2 years later. Infantino was key in introducing Financial Fair Play and greater financial support to smaller nations. Infantino oversaw UEFA's expansion of the 2016 European championship to 24 teams and helped conceive the Nations League. He was also a part of FIFA's reform committee, when he received the backing of the FIFA executive branch to take the role of President after Sepp Blatter, with one of his promises being the expansion of the world cup. Infantino is expected to implement the statutes created by FIFA and is responsible for the expansion of football.

Aleksander Ceferin

Aleksander Ceferin is the current president of UEFA. Graduating from law school in Ljubljana, Ceferin first served as the vice chairman of the UEFA Legal committee between 2011 and 2016. He was then elected president of UEFA. During his first term as president, he worked on creating parity in European football, reducing the gap between elite European clubs and the rest. Ceferin also focused on strengthening the Financial Fair Play measures instituted in 2009. During his second term, he navigated the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the Russian invasion of Ukraine by banning Russia from UEFA and moving the 2022 champions league final venue. After being elected for a third term, Ceferin hopes to shift the narrative into prioritizing player health and quality of matches as opposed to revenue generation.

Fatma Samoura

Fatma Samoura is the Secretary General of FIFA. Prior to being recruited by Infantino, she worked in various humanitarian positions in the United Nations. She was notably against the wearing of poppy symbols on uniforms and declared that any player from England, Scotland, or Wales wearing the symbol will be punished. She claimed that Britain is not the only country suffering from war, and that exceptions to the rule banning political symbols should not be made. Samoura has always been passionate about eliminating discrimination in football, most notably by heading up the creation of various women's divisions within FIFA as well as rooting out racism.

Victor Montagliani

Victor Montagliani is the president of the CONCACAF. A former player himself, Montagliani played for amateur Canadian side Columbus FC. Montagliani was also president of the British Columbia Soccer Association in 2005. During his time as president, he was in support of players' freedom of expression, especially supporting Sikh players in their desire to wear a turban while playing. In May 2012, he was voted as president of the Canadian Soccer Association. 4 years later, he ran and successfully was elected to be president of CONCACAF. Montagliani's latest responsibility includes logistics for the upcoming FIFA World Cup in the US, Canada, and Mexico. With tensions in North America rising, Montagliani needs to figure out a way to ensure what happens outside the pitch does not boil over to the actual game itself.

Patrice Monsepe

Patrice Monsepe is the president of the CAF. Monsepe started out as a partner at a law firm before expanding his portfolio as a businessman by founding and developing companies focused on mining, investing and renewable energy. His first foray into football included purchasing ownership of Mamelodi Sundowns, developing them into a powerhouse in Africa. In 2020, Monsepe declared his intention to run for the president of CAF but was accused of being supported by FIFA and Infantino. Still, he was able to win the presidency. Monsepe's vast sources of money enabled him to add more prize money to CAF hosted competitions, thus

enabling football associations in Africa to grow. Monsepe also helped football schools to grow by donating 10 million dollars for the creation of the African Schools Football Championship. Monsepe hopes to develop African football to be more sustainable by attracting more sponsorship revenue for clubs and tournaments.

Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani

Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani is the current Emir of Qatar. He played an important role in boosting Qatar's reputation on the international level by heavily investing in sports. He founded Oryx Qatar Sports Investments who own Paris Saint Germain. He led the delegation that successfully won the rights to host the 2022 World Cup. At the same time, Qatar's exploitation of migrant workers became a subject of international controversy. With Saudi Arabia becoming a rising force in the footballing industry, Tamim wants to shift the center of football from Europe to the Middle East in order to bolster their reputation as well as revenue.

Louis Van Gaal

Louis Van Gaal is Dutch former player and manager who currently serves as an advisor to Ajax. At a club level, Van Gaal was successful winning 20 major trophies while managing big clubs such as Barcelona, Manchester United, and Bayern Munich. He also had 3 stints as manager of the Netherlands national team. Van Gaal notably was against FIFA's decision to host the World Cup in Qatar, disagreeing with FIFA's intention to develop football in the country and claiming that the true reason was money and commercial interest. Van Gaal was also vehemently against the creation of the UEFA conference league.

Megan Rapinoe

Megan Rapinoe is a former football player and activist. She spent most of her career at Seattle Reign in the National Women's Soccer League, where she was able to win the Ballon d'or Feminin and best FIFA Women's Player of the Year. Alongside that, she represented the United States at an international level winning gold in the 2012 Olympics as well as multiple world cups. Rapinoe is an advocate for multiple LGBTQIA+ organizations, receiving recognition for the same from the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center. In September 2016, during an international game, she kneeled during the national anthem in solidarity with Colin Kaepernick, as well as speaking out against the use of artificial turf. Through her championing of equality, Rapinoe ensures that there is a place for everyone to play football.

Kevin De Bruyne

Kevin De Bruyne previously played for Manchester City and represents the Belgium national football team. Regarded as one of the greatest midfielders of the game, he was the engine in midfield during Manchester City's domination of the premier league. Recently, he has spoken out against the number of games players have to play, criticizing the financial interests that FIFA and UEFA seek. In his interview with Mundo Deportivo, De Bruyne warned that the endless

number of games will cause burnout for the top players as they only have 3 weeks of rest between the end of the Club World Cup and the start of the European season. Bearing witness to the collapse of the Manchester city squad due to the increased number of injuries, De Bruyne insists that FIFA should care for player welfare in order to preserve the quality of the game.

Thierry Henry

Thierry Henry is currently an analyst for CBS covering the champions league fixtures. He is a retired star of the game having played for Arsenal and Barcelona. He also manages the French Under-21 international team. Having been involved in all three levels, Henry's expertise is valuable. On the topic of the number of games he stated that it was great as a pundit to be able to talk about the plethora of games going on, from the perspective of a player and coach, it is too many games. Henry believes that the players and their integrity are of the utmost importance.

David Terrier

David Terrier is the vice president of the French Footballers Union and president of the European branch of FIFPro. He previously played for clubs such as Metz, Newcastle United, West Ham United, and Nice. Terrier vehemently dislikes the increasing number of games to be played in a calendar year and has stated on the record that he is weighing up legal action over changes being made to both the club and international career. Terrier believes that the current schedule is in disarray and that dialogue has been ineffective in solving it and that it was FIFPro's responsibility to fix it using any means at their disposal.

Didier Drogba

Didier Drogba is a former striker that played notably for Chelsea and Marseille as well as representing Côte d'Ivoire on an international level, where he became their top scorer. Drogba meant much more to the country than leading it on the football pitch, however. He used his influence to bring peace to a country during a turbulent time. In the middle of the first Ivorian civil war, the Côte d'Ivoire national team qualified for the 2004 World Cup. Rather than celebrating, he took the mic and begged that the warring entities stop their fighting and unite in support of the national team, and that was one of the first steps which led to a ceasefire and peace agreement 3 years later. Drogba believes that players should use their influence to advocate for the greater good.

Joshua Kimmich

Joshua Kimmich is a current player for Bayern Munich and the German national team. He was one of the players involved in Germany's protest against FIFA banning 'One Love' armbands by covering his mouth with his hand in the team photo. Unlike a lot of other European stars, Kimmich desires to play a lot more matches. He believes that the only alternative to the thrill of competing is physical exhaustion. He went so far as to say that he is a big fan of those weeks which involve intense competition.

Florentino Perez

Florentino Perez is the president of Real Madrid. Regarded as one of the greatest club presidents of all time, Perez has a disdain for the establishment as he has called for structural reform, claiming that Real Madrid has been the victim of existing corruption and inefficiency in football governance. He also believes in the health of players and that the quality of matches is declining, with young people not interested in football because of the number of poor quality games. To combat this, he developed the European Super League and became its first chairman before the idea completely collapsed.

Nasser Al-Khelaifi

Nasser Al-Khelaifi is the president of Paris Saint-Germain. Alongside that he is a chairman of the European Club Association and a member of the UEFA executive committee. He has been personally implicated in the 2015 corruption investigations, as well as PSG's fair play concerns, but has publicly backed FIFA and UEFA's legitimacy. Al-Khelaifi notably supported the expansion of the UEFA champions league believing that more high-stakes games will be beneficial for revenue generation and fan interest.

Yasir Al-Rumayyan

Yasir Al-Rumayyan is the governor of the Public Investment fund as well as chairman of Newcastle United. The Saudi Public Investment Fund bought a 75% stake in 4 clubs in the Saudi League: Al-Nasr, Al-Hilal, At-Alhi, and At-Ittihad. This enabled the Saudi Pro League to invest large sums of money to attract superstar players such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema and Neymar to increase the prominence of Saudi football as well its quality and competitiveness in order to improve global recognition.

Gianluca Ferrero

Gianluca Ferrero is the current chairman of Juventus. He recently took over the board of directors in the midst of a governance collapse after Andrea Agnelli and Pavel Nedved resigned. Prior to his arrival, Juventus found itself in the middle of a scandal when the club was accused of inflating player transfer values to show capital gains on their balance sheets, allowing the club to skirt Financial Fair Play. This resulted in Juventus getting a 15-point deduction in Serie A as well as a ban from participating in any UEFA competition. The penalty was decreased, but Ferrero still needs to rebuild trust within the club.

Samir Xaud

Samir Xaud is the current president of the Brazil Football Confederation (CBF). The CBF was affected when their previous president Ricardo Teixeira was implicated in the 2015 corruption scandal, calling into question the integrity of the operation of the Brazilian football ecosystem. They are also the biggest victims of the large volume of games to be played within a calendar

year with Fluminense playing almost 80 games, which has caused a significant rise in the number of injuries in the league. However, Xaud needs to figure out how to strike a balance between player wellbeing and quality to preserve the Brazilian talent from choosing to play abroad.

Paul Posa

Paul Posa is the current head coach of Auckland City FC, an amateur football team in New Zealand that has been the dominating force in the OFC. Its past performances in the OFC champions leagues earned the team a position in the Club World Cup. Posa himself was unable to travel to the US as it would affect his full-time job as a dentist. Posa hopes that Auckland City FC's exposure can be the first step in bridging the gap in quality of football between the OFC and the rest of the world.

Andrew Jennings

Andrew Jennings is a British investigative journalist who was focused on the corruption within FIFA as well as the IOC. In June 2006, he appeared on BBC's *Panorama* where he investigated allegations of bribery within FIFA, specifically with context to ISL and the vote sharing to secure Sepp Blatter's position as president. In 2010, he was in another controversial episode *FIFA's Dirty Secrets* which investigated allegations against the executives that were set to vote on the host of the 2018 world cup, claiming that several high-ranking officials received bribes from ISL to gain lucrative deals with FIFA.

Michael Garcia

Michael Garcia is an attorney and is currently serving as the associate judge of the New York Court of Appeals. Prior to this, he was a partner at Kirkland & Ellis, where he was selected to be chairman of the investigatory chamber of the Ethics committee of FIFA, where he looked into the bidding and decision processes of the 2018 and 2022 World Cups, ultimately drafting a 350 paged report. The resulting summary of the report was misleading, prompting Garcia to call for an appeal which was rejected. While Garcia resigned from his position in the investigatory chamber, he still intends to fix the lack of leadership present in FIFA as well as the lack of autonomy the investigation chamber has from FIFA.

Beatriz Perez

Beatriz Perez is the executive VP and chief of communications, sustainability and partnerships at Coca-Cola, FIFA's oldest standing corporate partner. Coca-Cola has been the official sponsor of every FIFA World Cup since 1978 and has had advertisements in stadiums during matches since 1950. In collaboration with the Panini Group, Coca-Cola is the primary distributor of FIFA licensed memorabilia as well as helping sponsor the men's and women's ranking of all football teams. Coca-Cola hopes to continue collaborating with FIFA and benefit from any increase in revenue or new sponsorship deals that the organization chooses to create.

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