



SEPP BLATTER: BEST WORLD CUP STILL AHEAD

global football family was facing troublesome times. You compared yourself to a ship's captain in rough sea. Why did the storm erupt? Which are the main problems you have to solve as the captain of the FIFA ship?

The problem is that FIFA enjoyed a phenomenal growth and reached a new level of quality. What do we want in football? Discipline and high morale based on fair play. To progress, serve the benefit of society, and fulfill the cultural and social mission. It is a school of life which operates. However changes in football brought it close to the economic sphere. So far we are satisfied that in modern world football does not face the economic crisis that hit the world.

Football possesses a mighty economic potential which influences culture and society and all of a sudden it developed into a political phenomenon. People began to think what is happening in football. It became a victim. We are victims, first and foremost, because we are popular and a very big organization. Hundreds of millions of people related to the game cannot be all winged angels. Naturally, we feel the pressure of social vice: violence, doping, corruption, fraud, and match-fixing. All negative phenomena in the world penetrated the game and we have to put an end to it. But how?

We experienced hostile reaction and criticism specifically after FIFA decisions adopted on December 2, 2010. We were criticized for granting the right to hold World Cups to Qatar and Russia instead of European

nations - Spain, Portugal, and Great Britain. Why didn't you choose those countries and preferred others? There were a lot of corruption claims and pressure on federation members. We had to respond. And we did: our ethics committee made a statement. But it was not enough. After I was reelected at the FIFA congress in 2011 I said: Gentlemen, let's review regulations now. We have to deal with the ethics committee which has two missions: investigate and discipline. Now it will have a third - we have to be more transparent and get an independent governance committee. I began the reform in 2011. The first results were made public in Budapest. I must say I am very satisfied. We have already made some achievements. We got a new committee which is in charge of audit and supervision and will be headed by an independent chairman. Now we have an independent ethics committee. We have a judicial department. But they are not enough and we have to revise regulations which offer a sphere where football community can work together. Transparent finances, the ethics committee can operate only in case national associations in the football pyramid abide by the same principles and operate the same way. We are on the right track.

To tell the truth, the international institution called football is in good shape and enjoys a good reputation. If there is criticism we shall take it into account. We are in the game which has numerous participants.

How did global football change in the past four decades? Can FIFA fight the vice of match-fixing and corruption? Aren't wages of players and transfer amounts too high? The most influential person in the world of football, FIFA President Sepp Blatter responds to the questions in an exclusive interview with ITAR-TASS First Deputy Director General MIKHAIL GUSMAN.

You headed the organization when it had 146 member-countries. Now they number 209. FIFA is a major international organization and it is even hard to imagine how it is possible to manage such an immense structure. What is specific about governing FIFA?

When I came to work in FIFA in February 1975, 38 years ago, it had only 11 staff and I was the 12th. It did not inspire me as in that

time number 12 belonged to reserve players who warmed the bench. And I did not like to be stand-by. My predecessor FIFA President Joao Havelange said football had to develop into a universal sport. It should not be a game only for Latina America and Europe. He began to look for a person capable of selling or implementing the idea and of promoting football and finding sponsors. FIFA did not have money at the time at all. I came in at the moment. I was 38 or 39 years old. I said I can do it. And I did it. Soon, in October 1981 I became secretary and in June 1998 FIFA president. In the past years football expanded to the whole planet. I mean it became popular in new countries and now 300 million people are directly related to the game. It is a difficult but pleasant mission to govern world football in the current uneasy situation. I can say that football affairs are in a good state at present.

The successes achieved by FIFA under your leadership are truly impressive. However in Zurich at the 61st FIFA congress you said the

Which terms and conditions do you believe should be observed for a country to host a World Cup? For example, your colleague and President of the International Olympic Committee Jacques Rogge said to host Summer Olympic Games a country should have a population of not less than 12 million people. And two-three million for Winter Games. What are the main requirements for a country to host a World Cup?

Thank you for the question as it takes us back to the philosophy of football development. I launched it in 1975 and continue to deal with development. Football World Cups were earlier held only in Europe and countries of America. Was it right? No...

The task is not just to expand and develop football, but to give other continents, countries and cultures a possibility to host World Cups. We began in 2002 by holding the World Cup in Japan and South Korea. After Asia we eyed the



African continent. However a major coalition of associations from Europe and South America objected. We had to go back to Europe, to Germany in 2006. But in 2010 we came to Africa. In 2014 we are going back to Brazil which won the World Cup five times already. Then a new region will follow - Eastern Europe which hosted no major competitions since 1980s. The Russian bid was very attractive and I cannot say it won because of my personal affection. It is only logical to complete the round-the-world trip in 2020 in the Arab world, in Qatar. Let's go back to the World Cup in Russia. What the European reaction was? Why in Russia but not in our countries which invented football? But it was the right decision. Such

sport events promote the development of the host countries.

I calculated that you personally participated in the organization of eight World Cups. Which competitions did you enjoy most of all as exemplary for our preparations?

The best World Cups are always ahead. Do you mean the Russian one can be the best?

It will be the best... Any World Cup has its



specifics related to the culture of the host country. The World Cup will be multicultural in Russia. As a football fan I can say the most exciting championship in my life was the World Cup in South Africa. Nobody in the so-called industrialized nations believed Africa can properly hold a World Cup. But they did it! They did it very well. For me it is the best World Cup so far, but better ones are still ahead.



I have one question, Mr. President, which has been torturing me for long years. In 1966 at the World Cup in London my fellow countryman, linesman from Baku Tofik Bakhrarov counted the goal for Englishmen against Germans and

thus predetermined their victory. You were not FIFA president at the time, but I am sure you watched the replay several times. Nearly half a century has passed but people are still arguing whether there was a goal or not. Can you dot the "i" in the dispute?

You put me into an embarrassing situation. It's my job!

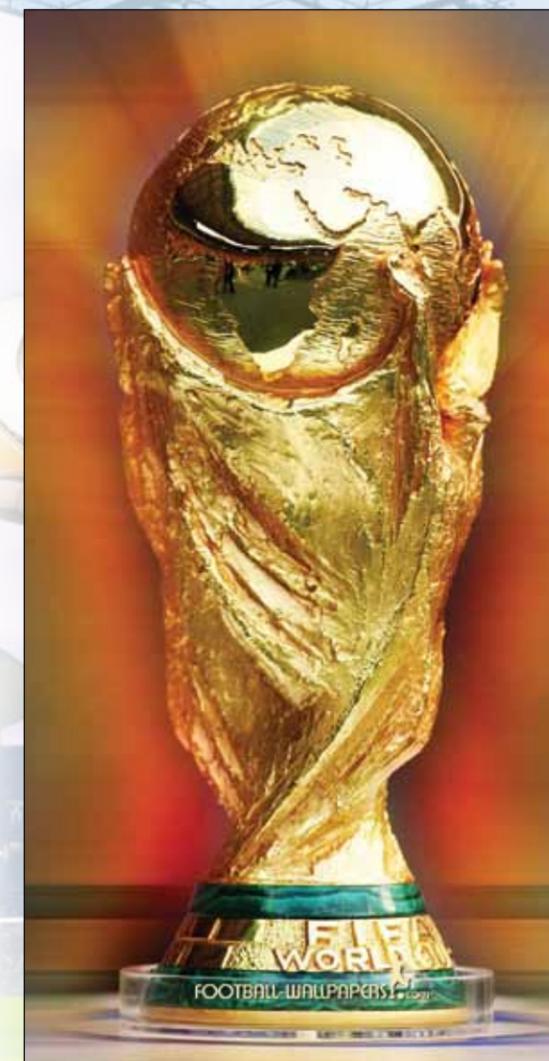
Yes, it is your job and you do it well. But I have to go back because I am in offside position because of you. I do not know whether it is active or passive offside. So let's go back.

We'll see who raises the flag.

Yes, we'll see. There can be dual interpretation of events. I arrived from Azerbaijan a week ago where we held a World Cup for girls under 17. It is an excellent example of holding competitions in a different cultural environment. There is a monument in front of the national stadium, the only monument to a football referee. His name is Tofik Bakhrarov. What happened at the World Cup? The referee was from Switzerland. Bakhrarov was the linesman. You can guess they did not speak the same language. The referee asked in his own language and Bakhrarov responded: yes, yes. Then he asked to show whether the goal was scored. And Bakhrarov said: no, no. However the answer was interpreted as yes. Okay, it is a goal. Such is the story of the goal, nobody today knows whether the ball crossed the line or not. But the referees' decision is final and the goal was scored. We want to avoid such situations with the help of technical means. We use the latest technologies at top level competitions.

I know there are disputes in FIFA whether to use modern technologies or not. Do you believe the technologies should be introduced or the conservative point of view that the referee has to decide everything himself should be kept intact?

I am hundred percent sure the mistakes should be judged by the referee. But when I saw the 2010 World Cup developments at the England-Germany match... Everyone saw the ball was 70 centimeters deep into the goal, but the referee did not see it. I told myself I have no right to hold the next World Cup without a special system that would fix such cases. But when I speak about the system I mean developments at the goal line, not on the pitch. I believe such technologies



should be used only at the goal line and when referees deem it necessary to check it out. Such a system should be available at FIFA World Cups, but it should not be permanently consulted.

You mentioned economic crisis... Today football players earn astronomic amounts. Huge money is paid for transfers. Do you think the huge amounts and wages attract people to the game or on the contrary make them distance themselves from football?

The football world is a free market which determines prices in the final end. I know there are demands to cut wages. But it is impossible in market economy conditions. I can provide some comparisons. Why a football player should earn less than a rock star or fashion model? A player earns big amounts in a year and participates in 70 matches a year. He plays before 10 or 100 thou-

sand people. Let's take Jenifer Lopez, for example. She likely gives 10 concerts a year. The most expensive transfer was with Ronaldo Senior - 60 or 70 million euro or close to 100 million dollars by the current exchange rate. I am often asked in such cases how can I reconcile with the amounts. I respond: in the same week Sotheby's in London auctioned a Picasso painting for 500 million. The buyer will take the picture and hide it from public eye. You cannot hide a football player. I compare modern players with gladiators. As Romans said, people need bread and circuses. Our football

When did you decide for yourself that female football is possible and that World Cups will attract attention? How do you assess the World Cup organization in Azerbaijan?

FIFA was "the old stamp" organization and only at the 1986 congress a Norwegian delegate asked the president while females are not mentioned in the annual report. Female football exists but there is no major work with it. And we began to develop it. The first international competition took place in 1989. The first World Cup followed in 1991 and is now regularly held every four

and all other cultures that girls and women can play the game. In some Muslim nations women do not enjoy all the rights granted in other countries. I talked with Mr. Aliyev, the president of Azerbaijan, and congratulated him with a good organization of the World Cup. The event will have major consequences for the development of female football in the world and for improved situation with women's rights in the whole world.

I want to go back to male football and ask you as a

Stefano. Next come Puskas, Pele, Beckenbauer. They are the older generation. If we look at the new one I would list Ronaldo Senior, new Ronaldo, and we should not forget Messi. He is a player which any club in the world dreams of recruiting and not only into the football team. He is a very pleasant man. There are others as well, including Cruyff, UEFA President Michel Platini. However for me Alfredo di Stefano is the number one. He is impeccable.

What about Soviet players? Can you distinguish any Russian player?

Naturally, I remember outstanding football player Simonyan. We should not forget distinguished Moscow Dynamo goalkeeper Yashin. In the older generation there is also Netto, in the younger generation - Ponomarev, Blokhin. I cannot remember anyone from the current generation because you do not have new stars.

However you have excellent goalkeeper Akinfeyev and you also have good strikers.

Preparations for the World Cup in Russia are already underway. What would you advise our organizing committee to pay most attention to? What lessons should they learn and what do you think is the most important at the given stage?

I must say it would be good in future to have such World Cup organizers as you have. Your organizers enjoy support. In such events it is necessary to have support of the president and government. I am sure we will also have support of the State Duma. We need support at the political level, as well as of the Russian Football Union and Mr. Mutko. I am sure your new president and the organizing committee together with FIFA organizing committee will successfully cope with the task. I have already said that it is very important that the coming World Cup will be multicultural as various regions and various cultures of the Russian Federation will hold the event. It will be an outstanding championship also because it is not squeezed by small geographic framework. The World Cup will be held in the Asian part of Russia but will also span to Europe and the Urals.



players are excellent experts in circuses. Clubs that can afford huge money should pay it.

You mentioned Football World Cup among girls in Azerbaijan. Honestly speaking I belong to a generation which could hardly imagine female football and a World Cup among girls.

years. Competitions of women under 20 and then under 17 followed. Female football was included into the Olympic Games. Gradually it began to spread across the world. I am glad that you mentioned Azerbaijan, a Muslim country which held a female World Cup. It is a major signal to the world

supporter, not as president. Who are five of your best players who you admired in your life?

You may be surprised, but I will begin with a name that excited me in the very beginning and I am still impressed with him although he does not play any longer. He is Alfredo di