

LATEST NEWS

Blatter could crash in £70m kickbacks inquiry

BY ANDREW JENNINGS

"LOOK out Sepp! No! Omigod, call an ambulance! Too late." The steel wheels on those Zurich trams cut you up worse than a Tam Forsyth tackle. Once the self-confident Herr Blatter, 73, came to expect traffic to halt when the Fifa President stepped off the kerb, the end of an era was in sight.

Talk of succession is taboo in his Zurich glass palace. Sepp will rule forever! Not in the dreams of the Swiss detectives probing Fifa's money laundering routes that spirited away £70 million in kickbacks.

If Blatter is indicted, it's hard

to see how he could cling to the throne. The sponsors – the real power at Fifa – wouldn't want a repeat in 2010 of the embarrassing opening ceremony in Seoul in 2002 when Blatter was booed after a dodgy re-election.

If the tram doesn't get him and the coppers do, two gangs of executioners are poised to pull the lever on Fifa's gallows.

Currently, any challenge is hopeless. Blatter practises light-touch auditing of Fifa development grants – and his voters love it. Waiting in ambush is the French Foreign Legion-led Uefa battalion. President Michel Platini is moving out of the shadow of

Blatter. But if he doesn't do something about the match-fixing in Eastern Europe, "Euro 2012" be inscribed on his headstone.

Fifa's chef de paperclips Jerome Valcke may hope to emulate Blatter, stepping up in 1998 to succeed Brazilian president Havelange. Valcke's rival inside Fifa is Blatter's fixer, former French diplomat Jerome Champagne. He's courting the vote in the Francophone countries – but some want cash Jerome hasn't got unless he can find a sponsor who wants Fifa contracts.

The Bayern Munich division of the Adidas brigade began

plotting the day after police raided Fifa House in 2005. They are backing Franz Beckenbauer. His campaign began in 2006 when he toured the world as a "World Cup Ambassador" shaking hands with hundreds of football officials who vote at Fifa congresses.

Hoping to be kingmaker again – he was indispensable to Blatter's 1998 campaign – is Qatar's Mohammed Bin Hammam. Soon to emerge from Fifa's youth academy is Mexico's Guillermo Canedo whose father sat on the committee for 35 years. The Latins and Jack Warner want the top job back in their backyard.

What do they inherit? A billion-dollar money machine. To keep transparency and accountability at bay Fifa is registered in the canton of Zurich as a *verein* – a small club of volunteers enjoying the same legal status as charities such as "The Zurich Gay Men's Choir".

From the Swiss tabloids to the posh papers there's been fury this week that Blatter appears to have got off lightly after nearly killing a motorist. Last October Blatter's £100,000 Mercedes SL car collided with two other vehicles. Blatter got off with a £360 fine. Commentators said the penalty "stinks to high heaven".

On-song Shala tipped for breakthrough

BY STEPHEN MORRISSEY

MANAGER Craig Levein has backed Andis Shala to kick-start his Dundee United career after waiting nine months to make his Clydesdale Bank Premier League debut.

The striker was thrown into the action as a substitute with 12 minutes remaining against Inverness and made an instant impact when he set up Lee Wilkie to cancel out Eric Odhiambo's opener and claim a point.

Shala's only other outing following his summer move from VFR Mannheim was an appearance in the 5-1 win over Cowdenbeath in the Co-operative Insurance Cup back in August.

Levein admits the player simply failed to settle in his

first few months in Scotland but believes he is now showing signs that he has a part to play at Tannadice.

He said: "Andis Shala has waited forever for his debut,

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he didn't settle well at all in the first two or three months.

"I don't know what it was. At one point I wondered what I'd done. But that happens sometimes and it takes some people longer than others to settle in.

"But, in the last couple of months, he has been doing really well. It was good to see

him get on the field. You can see his attributes, he is fantastic in the air and has a really powerful shot with his left foot so you will see more of him."

Paul Caddis also made his debut following his loan move from Celtic last month.

Levein added: "I was also happy with young Caddis. We didn't exactly overload him with the ball so I would like to see him on the ball a bit more. But he did all right."

Asked whether the decision to introduce Shala when he did was an inspired act, Levein said: "Sometimes your substitutions are desperation in all honesty. We didn't get going to anywhere near the same level we usually do.

"You have to do something if things aren't looking like they are going to change."



Andis Shala, left, made a big impact when he came on

SPL agree to Burley plea for later start to season

BY NEIL FASKIN

THE SPL have agreed to George Burley's request for the start of next season to be postponed until August 15.

The Scotland manager had asked for the kick-off of the 2009-10 campaign to be put back by a week to give him more time to prepare for the August 12 World Cup qualifier in Norway.

Following talks between SPL secretary Iain Blair and SFA chief executive Gordon Smith on Thursday, the SPL board yesterday decided to grant Burley's wish. However, the board reached their decision despite no guarantee of a sweetener from the SFA, who refused to give a commitment to move next season's Scottish Cup semi-finals from a weekend to a midweek date.

An SPL statement read: "The SPL board today announced that next season will kick off on August 15, 2009. This meets George Burley's request for a clear weekend ahead of the Norway v Scotland match on August 12.

"Facing a late start and an early end to the season because of the World Cup, we asked the SFA for a firm commitment to move the Scottish Cup semi-finals to a midweek.

"This would have provided certainty in giving a clear weekend to play a round of league matches and helped our teams with European commitments.

"The SFA told us that they would meet our request. But, subsequently, this commitment was withdrawn. The SPL board were deeply disappointed at the SFA's unwillingness to provide the commitment sought."

Blair said: "Helping the national side was at the forefront of our efforts over the past few days.

"We worked to find a way of accommodating George's request while managing the issues this creates for us and our clubs.

"We are disappointed the SFA were not more willing to work with us in assisting the national side."



1 What nationality is Falkirk goalkeeper Robert Olejnik?

2 Who holds the record as the oldest player to play in the SPL?

3 Which six Scots are managing teams in the English Championship?

4 How many League Cup winners medals did Ally McCoist earn to establish a competition record?

5 Who scored the winning goal when Greece won Euro 2004, defeating Portugal 1-0?

6 Which three clubs did Jonathan Johansson, pictured, play for after leaving Rangers and joining Hibernian?



7 Who is the only British player to have scored goals in the English Premiership, Serie A (Italy) and La Liga (Spain)?

8 Which Manchester City player appeared for Scotland during the 1974 World Cup tournament in West Germany?

9 Against which club did St Mirren play their first competitive match in their new stadium?

10 Who has the distinction of winning a Scottish Cup winners medal as a player and the following season as a manager?

ANSWERS

- 10 John Greig, 1978 and 1979.
9 Kilmarnock.
8 Denis Law.
7 David Beckham.
6 Charlton Athletic, Norwich City & FC Malmö.
5 Angelos Charisteas.
4 Nine.
3 Owen Coyle (Gunn (Norwich), (Preston) and Bryan Forrest), Alan Irvine (Birmingham City), Paul Sturrock (Plymouth), Billy Davies (Nottingham Forest), Alan Irvine (Preston) and Bryan Forrest).
2 Andy Millen (St Mirren), 42 years, 279 days, St Mirren v Hearts, 2008.
1 Austrian.

CULT HERO #6: HAMISH McALPINE

THERE'S nothing football fans love more than a man who courts their banter, plays to the gallery and blurs the distinction between pitch and paddock. In Hamish McAlpine, Dundee United fans had not just an outstanding goalkeeper but an ambassador on the park, a larger-than-life prince cut from their own (jute) cloth. From his berth in the penalty box – which he was wont to abandon in order to take on outfield players – he would conduct the Tannadice crowd and dance on demand to their shanties.

This moustachioed giant kept goal at Tannadice for almost 20 years. He joined United, aged 18, in 1966, made his debut in 1969 and was ever-present on the teamsheet by 1974. Indeed, from August 1974 until May 1984, he played all but 14 competitive games for the club; when he missed a handful of matches in 1980, it was only because of a burst blood vessel sustained in a clash during a league game at Ibrox.

He was made captain

in the late 1970s and, under the management of Jim McLean, led United sides to back-to-back League Cup triumphs in 1979 and 1980, and the Premier Division title in 1983. At one stage he was even McLean's preferred penalty-taker – he scored three times from the spot for United then took his goal tally to four when, playing for Raith Rovers towards the end of his career, he netted from a wind-assisted clearance.

Few sportsmen can claim to have songs written about them – and fewer still good songs – but McAlpine was honoured on both counts on Hamish the Goalie, by the Dundee folk singer Michael Marra. The goalie himself left Tannadice in 1986, having surrendered his position to Billy Thomson, and hung up his gloves in 1989 following spells at Raith and Arbroath. He has since worked intermittently for United as a goalkeeping coach, in the commercial department and as a match day host, but even to this day, boys hopped in tangerine know from Marra, albeit via their fathers, that Big Hamish "stokes young men's dreams into a burning flame." Never was there a character in football more deserving of such poetry.

Kenny Hodgart

