

A NEW EMPIRE

THE WACKY WORLD OF PRESIDENT SEPP

■ 'I BELIEVE in transparency, we have started to build transparency brick by brick from 1999 onwards' — Blatter tells it like it isn't at the Seoul emergency congress on finance in 2002.

■ IN 1971 he became president of the Worldwide Friends of Suspenders, a group who 'regret women replacing suspender belts with pantyhose'.

■ HE tried to ridicule FIFA rival Chung Mong Joon before the 2002 World Cup by telling the Korean to stop his countrymen eating dogs.

■ THE man ousted to make way for Sepp as general secretary, Helmut Kaser, became his father-in-law. Barbara Blatter didn't tell dad about the marriage.

■ IN 2004 Blatter told a Swiss newspaper reporter that he wanted women footballers to wear tighter, more buttock-defining shorts.

■ SEPP had to apologise to the FIFA executive committee after telling a reporter he wanted a World Cup every two years.



Is this what you had in mind, Sepp? One fan in hotpants takes you at your word, but her friend misheard and thought FIFA wants women who get sent off to be suspended
Pictures: REUTERS, AP, EPA, GETTY IMAGES



claimed: 'The F-crew is a consultative body that aims to promote internal communication and accelerate problem solving.'

BY LATE 2000, alarm bells were ringing inside FIFA. Sepp Blatter had problems of his own. His gift of \$250,000 a year to each of the 200-plus national associations, before the new money arrived from the sale of television and marketing rights for 2002, had done wonders for his popularity, but must have been putting FIFA finances under pressure. There were fears that within three months pay cheques to the staff might bounce. Incredibly, the world's richest sport was running out of money.

Unless Blatter could lay his hands on a lot of cash fast, he would have to stop the hand-outs, forcing countless associations to abort development plans. It would be a catastrophe for FIFA and for the president who had let it happen. But new finance director Urs Linsi negotiated a loan of \$243m from the Credit Suisse bank, averting the crisis. Salaries could be paid, grants made and there was plenty in the cash box for the largesse that might help Blatter win votes.

But then ISL went bankrupt. That loan was now an embarrassment. The following year in Seoul Blatter was up for re-election and would have to own up to a mighty hole in the finances. But Linsi hadn't worked in credit leasing for nothing — he had a plan to turn disaster into apparent success.

If FIFA were to sell future World Cup marketing contracts, the proceeds could be booked as income, the bank loan erased and the balance sheet would look great. Blatter could be acclaimed as an inspired leader who

had steered FIFA through stormy waters, balancing the books.

But Linsi had to arrange the 'securitisation' quickly. FIFA had to change their accounting methods to conform with new international standards that forbade future income from being used this way. If he wasn't quick, the window of opportunity would close and the 2002 report would reveal the debt. The deal went through and Linsi pumped up FIFA's flagging finances with an injection of \$558m. Spread across the books for 2000 and 2001, it was a sight to gladden the heart.

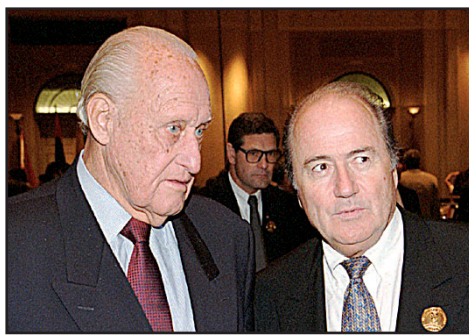
At Seoul in 2002, Blatter faced re-election against one of his vice-presidents, Issa Hayatou, who had forced an extraordinary congress to debate the financial crisis.

General secretary Zen-Ruffinen warned delegates: 'I have been prevented from any access to the finances of FIFA by the chief financial officer and by the president. The report on the finances being presented to you does not paint the transparent picture it pretends to do. On the contrary, some figures look better than they are.'

It was not enough — despite boos, whistles and slow handclapping, Blatter called on a succession of stooges to address the congress and he was returned to office by 139 votes to 56.

He may have mortgaged FIFA's future, but one day that would be somebody else's problem. For now, the good times could continue to roll.

Abridged extracts from 'Foul! The Secret World of FIFA: Bribes, Vote-rigging and Ticket Scandals' by Andrew Jennings, published by HarperSport at £18.99. ©Andrew Jennings 2006. To order a copy at £15.99 (+£1.95 p&p) call 0870 161 0870.



Heir to the throne: Havelange and Blatter combined to 'buy' votes to ensure the succession



Eye to eye: Johansson was in tears after losing the election to Blatter and he is now a FIFA vice-president



Paris match: Platini signed on with Blatter's F-Crew, the real power behind FIFA

THE SCREAMER

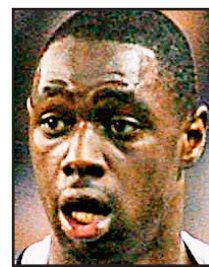
... IT'S THE TALK OF FOOTBALL
EDITED BY SIMON JONES

Masked Schwarzer aims for final spot

MIDDLESBROUGH goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer is set to play in the UEFA Cup Final wearing a protective mask over his broken cheekbone. The Australia international expects to return to training this week after receiving permission from his surgeon to play next Wednesday. The final decision on his participation in the game against Sevilla will be at the discretion of the referee, but FIFA regulations allow for players to wear masks. Boro skipper Gareth Southgate is also hoping to be fit after scans revealed that his hamstring strain is not

a full-scale tear. The defender hobbled out of last week's semi-final win over Steaua Bucharest and was rated a major doubt. But he said: 'It is a small nick in my hamstring so I have definitely got a good chance of being there. I am confident about being ready, without wishing to make any definite prediction.' West Ham striker Dean Ashton — whose collision with Schwarzer caused the keeper's injury in the FA Cup semi-final — has admitted it is 'touch and go' whether he plays in the final against Liverpool on May 13 because of a hamstring injury.

LEDLEY KING (right) has signed a four-year contract to stay at Spurs. The England defender's deal was due to expire at the end of next season but Spurs' 25-year-old captain, who is bidding to recover from a broken metatarsal before the World Cup, has committed himself to the club.



SOUTHAMPTON'S long-promised spending spree started yesterday when chairman Rupert Lowe sanctioned a £2million deal for Spurs striker Grzegorz Rasiak. The Poland forward, 27, has scored four times in 12 games on loan at St Mary's, and Lowe, under pressure from fans and shareholders to quit, has always said he would let manager George Burley build a side capable of returning to the Premiership.

Bruce decision day

STEVE BRUCE will meet Birmingham directors on Friday to reveal whether he wants to stay as manager of the relegated club. Club owners David Gold and David Sullivan say Bruce will be given a chance to lead Birmingham back to the Premiership at the first attempt, but Bruce has been hit hard by relegation and may reject that challenge. Sullivan

said: 'Steve will put forward his proposals, we'll put out our proposals and by Monday we will make public the outcome of that meeting. But it will be decided on Friday. 'The ball is in Steve's court. We would very much like him to stay. He needs a few days to get his mind together and to decide if he wants a break, or to come fighting back.'

ARSENAL are the latest club to express an interest in Lazio midfielder Ousmane Dabo. The 29-year-old Frenchman, a friend of Manchester United's Mikael Silvestre and Chelsea's William Gallas, has confirmed he is holding talks with Manchester City. He is out of contract this summer and said: 'There is no news from Arsenal yet. My agents are working with different English squads, but I don't know anything.'

MOTTY'S 50 WORLD CUP GREATS

14 GORDON BANKS (England)

Who could ever forget Gordon Banks' peerless displays as England goalkeeper in the 1966 World Cup, or his unforgettable jack-knife save from Pele in Mexico four years later? It was a sudden stomach upset on the day of the game that ruled Banks out of the quarter-final against West Germany, when England conceded three goals after leading 2-0.

Caps: 73 Goals conceded: 57
World Cups: 1966, 1970 Games: 9 Goals conceded: 4