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- [Blogs Home](#)
- [UK](#)
- [Foreign](#)
- [Technology](#)
- [Fashion](#)
- [Politics](#)
- [Arts](#)
- [Sport](#)
- [Society](#)
- [Travel](#)
- [Motoring](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Guests](#)



David Bond

Inside Sport

- [More Sport blogs](#)

David Bond is the Daily Telegraph's chief sports reporter. Every Thursday his Inside Sport column will bring you the stories behind the sporting headlines. But he will also be blogging here regularly on the issues raised in his investigations and reports.

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[Suspicions grow over Fifa foul play](#)

Posted by [David Bond](#) at 26 Sep 06 17:30

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With Lord Stevens preparing to deliver his report on illegal payments in transfer deals and the fall out from last week's Panorama still being felt, it would be easy to imagine that corruption in football is an English disease.



Named: former Fifa president Joao Havelange

But as William Gaillard, Uefa's director of communications, pointed out in an interview with the BBC on Sunday the culture of backhanders and bungs is prevalent across Europe.

And thanks to a recently published book by the investigative journalist and author Andrew Jennings it is clear that the suspicions and allegations don't stop at Europe's borders.

Shortly before the start of the World Cup, Jennings published "Foul!", his long awaited book on corruption at the heart of world governing body Fifa.

In it he makes a series of damning allegations against the men who run the most powerful organisation in the global game. If they are true then it is easy to understand why football's moral compass would appear to be spinning out of control.

The central allegation is that Fifa's marketing partner ISL paid bribes to senior Fifa officials to secure lucrative television and sponsorship rights contracts over two decades.

Jennings says the secret slush fund, which was channelled through a bank account held in Liechtenstein, was only discovered after a payment worth £400,000 was accidentally sent to a top ranking executive at Fifa house in Zurich.

It was confirmed following the collapse of ISL in 2001, when Swiss liquidator Thomas Bauer told Jennings that he had found what he described as "football related" payments from the company to Fifa officials, with some in excess of one million swiss francs (£400,000).

Jennings is careful (no doubt acting under strict instructions from his publishers' lawyers) not to name who received the bribes in the book but in a programme for Panorama, screened in June, he alleges the recipient of the £400,000 payment mistakenly sent to Fifa house was former Fifa president Joao Havelange.

Havelange and Fifa have denied any wrongdoing and in the Panorama investigation Havelange asks Jennings to refer all questions regarding Fifa to his successor Sepp Blatter.

It is unlikely to be the last question Blatter faces on the matter. Swiss magistrates from the canton of Zug are still investigating ISL's bankruptcy.

Thomas Hildbrand, the economic crime investigator leading the inquiries into the claims that ISL embezzled money relating to a TV contract with Brazilian company Globo, raided Fifa's offices last November and Swiss prosecutors are still weighing up whether to bring six senior figures

from ISL to trial. If the case goes ahead it is expected a trial will be held early next year.

Crucial to the case will be the names of the Fifa officials who were allegedly on the kickbacks list uncovered by liquidators. A report in today's Guardian claims that Swiss magistrates have accused Nicolas Leoz, a Fifa executive committee member and president of South American football confederation Conmebol, of being one of those beneficiaries.

Leoz is reported by the Guardian to have been accused of receiving £90,000 in two separate bribes but he told the paper he has no connection with ISL and both he and his executives deny the accusation.

The matter is complicated by the fact that Swiss law is considered more lenient on payments relating to commissions in big money deals. What would be considered a bribe under American or British law would be considered a legitimate commission payment in the Swiss courts.

But perhaps even more important is the identity of who repaid 2.5m swiss francs (£1m) to the liquidator in part payment of the alleged "bribes" money. Jennings alleges it was paid by Fifa to keep the true identity of the recipients secret, a claim Fifa categorically deny. It is a fact that the repayment of that money is now being investigated by Hildbrand.

Jennings describes the fall out from the ISL case as the ticking time bomb under Blatter's Fifa. And with vice president Jack Warner also currently under investigation by a Fifa disciplinary committee over alleged profiteering from the black market sale of World Cup tickets the next few months will go a long way towards proving whether Jennings' view of the organisation is right.

Over the last 10 years Jennings has become a regular fixture in the international sporting circus, popping up at press conferences in remote corners of the world to try and put a question to Fifa executives, only to be shown the door.

This correspondent can recall a time back in March when Jennings was hiding in a snow topped bush outside Fifa house in Zurich waiting to ambush Blatter.

It makes for great theatre and there is no doubt that his latest offering on sports corruption (he has written three books on the International Olympic Committee) is an entertaining read.

His critics say there are fundamental errors in the book and that he is a missionary on a campaign to discredit Blatter. He has been threatened with legal action but so far, Jennings says, he has received no writs.

What the future holds for Fifa remains uncertain but Jennings' dogged pursuit of Blatter and the other men who run the world game serves as an overwhelming reminder that the urgent need for greater transparency in football is not confined to these shores.

Note: To check out more about Andrew Jennings' work go to his website transparencyinsport.org.

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blogtastic

Ah, David Bond, king of Blogs, has once again delivered a blog of quite splendid proportions. Here's to more of his blogs!!!

dave voley at 27 Sep 2006 00:30

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