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"DILIGITE JUSTITIAM QUI JUDICATIS TERRAM." "Ye who judge the earth, give diligent love to justice"

The Meaning and Price of Football.

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The Meaning and Price of Football.

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Corruption in the world of sports, especially within FIFA, cannot be understood as merely the actions of a handful of individuals, but rather as a structural phenomenon that serves the interests of power, the unchecked management of resources, and the absence of oversight mechanisms. Football is not just a sport, it mirrors many aspects of the world, such as the political, economic, and cultural tensions of global society. Therefore, studying football's corruption today, as throughout its history, allows us not only to understand an institutional crisis in the world's most popular sport, but also to discern its causes and consequences in social life and even in legal systems.

Corruption is defined as the abuse of power for private gain¹; therefore, it follows that this activity involves not only public officials but also private individuals. Similarly, corruption is not limited to simple bribery or fraud, but also features influence peddling, procedural manipulation, and institutional capture, which deforms the purpose of institutions serving the common good to attend the enrichment and protection of specific groups.

The Source of Corruption.

"According to Transparency International, corruption has effects that go beyond the economic sphere, as it erodes institutional trust, weakens democracy, hinders development, and increases inequality."²

Corruption does not arise out of nowhere, but rather develops in contexts marked by

institutional weakness, impunity, concentrated power, and limited accountability mechanisms. International examples include South Sudan, where civil war and instability have allowed military elites to dominate everything in their path, and Somalia, where the absence of a government rewards a system of survival of the strongest, as well as others such as Venezuela, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, and Nicaragua, which according to an analysis conducted by Sanction Scanner, are the most corrupt countries in the world³; and while each state has its own particular characteristics, taken together they exhibit common patterns such as political instability, weak judicial systems, authoritarianism, and the capture of the state by elite groups.

FIFA as a political entity.

Even though FIFA is not a state, it has functional characteristics that are comparable to countries of a traditional government structure, as it manages substantial resources, establishes rules, makes high-impact decisions, and interacts with political and economic actors at the highest levels. Consequently, it is not surprising that there is a lack of oversight and that it replicates the dynamics of systems tainted by corruption.

The history of football offers plenty of examples, the sport's corruption did not emerge in the 21st century, nor is it a product of recent globalization. Examples include the 1915 match-fixing scandal involving players from Manchester United and Liverpool, in which several players were suspended for life⁴, also there is the 1934 World Cup, marked by interference from the host country⁵, and various other incidents that have become

1.- Transparency International, "What is corruption?", (<https://www.transparency.org/en/what-is-corruption>)

2.- Ibidem 1.

3.- Minhac Celik, "Top 10 Most Corrupt Countries in 2026", Sanction Scanner (<https://www.sanctions Scanner.com/blog/top-10-most-corrupt-countries-in-2026-1231>)

4.- El Tiempo, "Los cinco casos de corrupción en el fútbol mundial" (<https://www.eltiempo.com/deportes/futbol-internacional/los-cinco-casos-de-corrupcion-en-el-futbol-mundial-110284>)

5.- Juan Miguek Zunzunegui "El lado oculto de los Mundiales" (https://youtu.be/1knMod2bguQ?si=vyBUBv1kmNmM_UK9)

classics of popular culture. Beyond these specific examples, the cases show that the manipulation of results has existed practically since football gained professional and economic significance, getting increases in match-fixing, illegal betting, and refereeing controversies driven by money and power.

“Over time, corrupt practices exceeded the playing field and spreaded to the management structures.”

The expansion of football in the marketplace, the commercialization of tournaments, and the growing politicization of the sport is creating greater incentives to control the organization and, by extension, the business. A striking example of this is the scandal of May 27, 2015, when Swiss authorities raided a hotel in Zurich to arrest several high-ranking FIFA officials for the commission of international crimes such as bribery, fraud, and money laundering⁶, popularly known as FIFA gate. From that moment on, it became clear that corruption within the institution was never limited to socially unacceptable behavior but always involved crimes at the highest level and the interference by international powers. From a legal standpoint, this case had a significant impact, as it made it clear that football could no longer credibly self-regulate without external oversight, since its internal structures proved insufficient for preventing and punishing corruption networks.

Currently, the 2026 World Cup has reignited many of those concerns, and the media has issued various alleged warnings about possible

illegal match-fixing, the most notable being the likely support provided to Argentina, where it is suspected that it may have occurred both during the preparation for the tournament and its execution, demonstrating that the public's suspicion of FIFA has not diminished⁷, even though, from a legal standpoint, a distinction must be made between an allegation and fully proven conduct; the mere suspicion of such activities continues to place the sport's governing institution in the crosshairs of public scrutiny, resulting in a possible lack of trust and credibility.

The problem is particularly serious given that this is not merely a case of manipulating a World Cup in the realm of sports, but also involves the possible commission of international crimes, thus corruption in an event of this magnitude poses complex challenges for legal systems that must confront increasingly sophisticated criminal plots that are consequently difficult to prove. Therefore, FIFA faces not only a crisis of reputation but also the obligation to demonstrate that its oversight system can prevent crimes and, where necessary, referring them to the competent authorities for prosecution.

The source of the problem.

It is important to understand why football is a fertile ground for corruption. The answer is not limited to FIFA as an organization but lies in the deep relationship between sports and society. According to David Goldblatt (a football historian), football is the most extraordinary reflection of society, so the pathology of the sport is, to a large extent, the same as that found in the social order⁸. Football expresses collective passions,

6.- Ibidem 4.

7.- El imparcial, “Luego de que Messi firmó con el Inter Miami, Infantino instaló una sede de la FIFA en la misma ciudad; después de que Donald Trump volvió a la Presidencia de EE. UU., abrió otra oficina en la Torre Trump, donde el organismo paga una renta estimada de casi medio millón de dólares al año: ¿por qué estos vínculos alimentan las sospechas de corrupción y supuestas ayudas a Argentina en los Mundiales?” (<https://www.elimparcial.com/deporte/2026/07/28/luego-de-que-messi-firmo-con-el-inter-miami-infantino-instalo-una-sede-de-la-fifa-en-la-misma-ciudad-despues-de-que-donald-trump-volvio-a-la-presidencia-de-ee-uu-abrio-otra-oficina-en-la-torre-trump-donde-el-organismo-paga-una-renta-estimada-de-casi-medio-millon-de-dolares-al-ano-por-que-estos-vinculos-alimentan-las-sospechas-de-corrupcion-y-supuestas-ayudas-a-argentina-en-los-mundiales/>)

8.- Johan Cruyff Institute, “David Goldblatt: ‘El fútbol es realmente el reflejo más extraordinario de la sociedad’” (https://johancruyffinstitute.com/es/blog-es/david-goldblatt-el-futbol-es-realmente-el-reflejo-mas-extraordinario-de-la-sociedad/?srsltid=AfmB0oovli_RckitSLNf_Ok7QPSc6WbX3hPon549PKLHComkbFij7Qsm)

but also inequality, the pursuit of power, market abuse, and forms of impunity tolerated by society, therefore, corruption does not affect the sport from the outside, but rather emerges from the very same economic, political, and cultural conditions that make corrupt practices possible in the rest of the world.

“When a society prioritizes results regardless of the means employed, a lack of transparency consequently becomes the norm when it benefits the established powers, and football will unequivocally reflect these flaws.”

Conclusion

Corruption within FIFA is nothing more than a symptom of a culture in which spectacle, money, and influence take precedence over ethics, the common good, and the rule of law, reflecting that the problem is not merely administrative or individual, but also structural and cultural, since society projects onto football ideals of justice, merit, equality, and belonging, but at the same time, the very same vices that undermine public life.

Corruption in football is the manifestation of a structural problem that intertwines power, money, opacity, and impunity in one of the most influential cultural industries on the planet, a comprehensive analysis of this issue reveals a constant pattern, wherever power is exercised without sufficient checks and balances, corruption finds favorable conditions to spread. Football, as a privileged mirror of society, reproduces these tensions and projects them on a global scale. Therefore, combating corruption in FIFA is not merely a sporting task, but an ethical, social, and legal imperative.

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