

FIFA NEEDS REFORM

AND RESPECT AND ENFRANCHISEMENT AND A MANDATE FOR MEANINGFUL WORK

Jerrad Peters

"If a man does not know to what port he is steering, no wind is favourable to him." These words of Seneca were penned during the latter days of the stoic's retirement on the outskirts of Rome. Having withdrawn from public life (and given that he spent nearly a decade tutoring the emperor Nero—whom early Preterists held to be the Antichrist—it was quite the life) he imparted what wisdom he had gained in a series of letters addressed to the procurator of Sicily, among which was embedded this quote. Laced with age and experience, it speaks to the value of an objective. And, between the lines, it warns of a vessel drifting aimlessly, rocked by waves to the side of the frame. FIFA would do well to adopt Seneca's hindsight, perhaps altering it into a sort of advanced retrospection to suit its purposes. With long-time president Sepp Blatter having announced his intention to resign, world football's governing body has a unique, perhaps unprecedented, opportunity to reset its course, to choose its port of call. Getting there will no doubt require the sagacity and clairvoyance of an as-yet-unknown captain, but even before he or she is installed at an Extraordinary Council, likely to be convened in early 2016, the organization can at least deliberate on the direction it wants to go. And it can do so by posing a single, all-encompassing question: "What do we want FIFA to be?" Because it's only after undergoing such an existential inquiry that the bearings are determined.

"IF A MAN DOES NOT KNOW TO WHAT PORT HE IS STEERING, NO WIND IS FAVOURABLE TO HIM."

Right
The Resignation of FIFA'S President Sepp Blatter gives the organization a chance to reset.



Incidentally, many different people have wanted FIFA to be many different things throughout its 111-year history. Initially comprised of seven European associations with an eye towards broader organization of the sport at international level, it was largely disregarded by the Home Nations, which had little interest in relinquishing their grip on a game they felt was best consolidated in themselves. To them, at the time, FIFA didn't seem the sort of body they could manipulate. But as the fledgling institution grew in numbers and influence, the British, after the Second World War, brought themselves into the fold. The post-war years saw FIFA run as a mostly Eurocentric society. Twelve of the 16 teams at the 1954 World Cup were European; South America was allocated just a pair of berths. Africa had none. As it happened, Sir Stanley Rous, president of FIFA between 1961 and 1974, tried for a time to include South Africa in the quadrennial tournament. But as Rous was an apartheid supporter, even this attempt was tinged with racism. For its administrators from 1946 to 1974, FIFA was a remnant of imperialism. Which is why the election of Joao Havelange was greeted with such enthusiasm throughout the Americas and in Asia, Africa and Oceania—anywhere, really, that was ready to peel away the European tentacles. The 1982 World Cup—the first under Havelange's watch—was grown to 24 teams, of which only 14 hailed from Europe. At the 1998 event—the Brazilian's last—there were four Asian participants, five African and eight from the Americas among the 32, which represented yet another expansion. As we know, Havelange's big-business approach to international football and its organizational setup invited no shortage of corruption allegations, but given their enfranchisement it was an oversight the non-European confederations were willing to make. And they continued with the trade-off under Blatter, his successor. As former Zambia international and current president of that country's football association remarked after the 79-year-old's resignation

announcement, "Sepp did very well for Africa, and whoever succeeds him should look to do the same. Added Ghana's FA chief Kwesi Nyantakyi: "It's very irritating for someone to ask me why I voted for Blatter. Why shouldn't I? We take decisions on the situation on the ground by looking at the pros and cons...and whether it benefits us." For the non-European bloc, FIFA represents a route to inclusion, and their support of Blatter reads rather differently among that constituency than in the Global North-West, where reform schemes such as privatizing the World Cup and ending the one-confederation, one-vote election system are now being discussed. "None of these solutions have much to do with the meat of the FBI's findings," wrote Elliot Ross in a June 3 editorial for Al Jazeera. "Instead, these so-called solutions favour an old-fashioned power grab, and such responses will permanently impoverish the world's game if they succeed." As Ross went on to explain, the ideal of a global football body involves positive, social construction that accomplishes a universality of enfranchisement across languages, genders, races and socioeconomic barriers. The idea of FIFA, if this is its *raison d'être*, is a good one, an important one, and a complete destruction and reconstruction of the organization would inevitably leave many of the same problems it's currently experiencing. No doubt a handful of powerful people involved in football governance must be removed from those places of power over the next few months, and Blatter, should he be guilty of criminal behaviour, might even be among them. But where does FIFA go from there? Hopefully, if it embraces the thinking of the stoic, it will first determine the objective before charting the course. There is something for FIFA in Seneca's wisdom, but unheeded the winds will be unfavourable, the organization shipwrecked or, at the very least, sent back to a time when it served so very few.

Twitter @JerradPeters