

The Council of What?

FIFA has taken an unusual twist on the concept of addressing problems by forming a committee



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Faced with multiple allegations of improprieties regarding soccer's international governing body, FIFA President Sepp Blatter did what many a sport or political leader before him has done: He formed a committee. But not just any committee. Blatter could have created something like cricket's "anti-corruption commission," a

reassuring name that connotes something akin to Eliot Ness's "Untouchables." (As an aside, if your sport needs an ongoing "anti-corruption commission," the problem may be too entrenched for a mere commission or committee to solve.) Instead, Blatter put a most curious and uniquely maladroitness twist on the familiar "let's form a committee" concept.

2011 has been a particularly messy year for Blatter, whose trail of problems stems back to his first election as FIFA President in 1998. His present travails include questions related to his 2011 reelection to a fourth term (a victory assured when his primary opponent withdrew after being accused of offering bribes), the suspension of four FIFA Executive Committee members, further allegations of bribery surrounding the selection of Qatar to host the 2022 World Cup, and controversy over the choice of Russia to host the 2018 World Cup. Amid calls to do something for soccer and FIFA's image, Blatter chose to form a "Council of Wisdom." And what sport luminaries would bring the "wisdom" to this council? None other than those noted soccer experts Placido Domingo and Henry Kissinger (along with former Dutch player Johan Cruyff). Really?

It would appear that Placido Domingo's primary involvement in soccer has been to sing at various World Cups. But maybe Blatter is on to something. The traditional stewards of a number of sports seem to be having difficulties recently in dealing with various issues afflicting their competitions. So perhaps Blatter's theory that his sport's problems can be solved by a singer who has performed at one of sports' major events, teamed with a well-known international diplomat, should serve as a template for others.

For instance, Roger Goodell could have invoked Blatter's theory to solve the NFL's labor problems by forming a commission including Christina Aguilera (whose performance at the most recent Super Bowl, although bungled, gives her the requisite experience) and former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi

Annan. And what should the UCI do regarding Tyler Hamilton's very public allegations about doping in the Tour de France and other cycling events? A "Council of Substance" headed by Lady Gaga and former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright would be able to sort it all out. What about problems with age verification in Little League baseball that surface every now and then? To minimize the risk of these occurrences, Little League would be well-advised to form a "Council of Youth Wisdom" populated by Justin Bieber and child-star-turned-diplomat Shirley Temple Black—or even Rebecca Black for that matter.

For competitions or leagues that are strictly domestic, we may not even need the international diplomat. As the NBA looks to address its own labor woes, a "Council of Greatness" headed by Spike Lee and Jack Nicholson (two of the most fervent celebrity observers of the game) would surely do the right thing—assuming the NBA could handle the

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truth. Perhaps they could even bring the "Octomom" into their council for her expertise on complicated labor issues.

envisioned in the 1989 film "Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure" in which society was ruled by a sort of Future Council made up of the Three Most Important People in the World. The chairman of that council was the late, great Clarence Clemons, who of course would have been well qualified for any such position, having played a Super Bowl halftime show with the E Street Band. His two fellow council members were Fee Waybill, the lead singer of the Tubes, and Martha Davis, the lead singer of the Motels.

Whatever Blatter's intentions, his maneuver was as off pitch as the music of Wild Stallions—Bill and Ted's group that formed the basis for the civilization over which the Big Man, Waybill and Davis presided. Nevertheless, we can all hope that the wisdom of Domingo, Kissinger and Cruyff will bring a better tone to international soccer governance. ■

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