

## 'Intense' campaign ahead for England 2018 bid

*A leading communications and strategy advisor to sports governing bodies and major event bidders believes that 'there's all to play for' in the battle to host the 2018 FIFA World Cup, despite a sticky start to England's bid campaign.*



In the light of FIFA General Secretary Jérôme Valcke's comment this week that a 'rich European country' would be well-suited to hosting the 2018 World Cup, and with the appointment of Andy Anson as the England bid team's CEO, the Football Association would appear in good shape to launch a successful bid.

However, Vero CEO Mike Lee told BritSport Weekly that the campaign is going to be 'interesting and intense' and that 'predicting the winner is not easy at this stage'.

"Jérôme Valcke's comments are encouraging for the European candidates for 2018, particularly if FIFA choose the 2022 host country at the same time," Lee said. "Europe has a good track record on delivering successful World Cups and considering FIFA's informal continental rotation pattern, Europe generally hosts every third World Cup. With South Africa 2010 and Brazil 2014, there is every reason to think that a European candidate has a good chance of hosting the 2018 event.

"In that context, England is clearly one of the strongest football countries in the world, commercially strong with good venues and infrastructure. However, there are other credible bidders from Europe - including Russia and Spain - who should not be dismissed. Backing from Europe may well be the key to success, given the influence of UEFA, though bids from Australia and possibly China could also be significant.

Lee, a former communications chief for both the Premier League and UEFA, and the director of communications and public affairs during the successful London 2012 bid campaign, adds that the choice of Andy Anson should benefit the bid.

"Andy looks to be a good choice as CEO," says Lee. "He has the advantage of having worked in football and clearly understands brands and the business of sport. He will have good international contacts from his time at Manchester United, particularly in his role in creating successful international pre-season tours.

"His work as European Chief Executive of the ATP will have given him the benefits of further exposure to the international sporting environment and its politics - a good grounding for a bid campaign. He is also a personable and likeable guy who can clearly manage people and projects - valuable assets in promoting England's bid."

For all that, Lee concludes that the FA needs to overcome some major communication challenges if they are to claim the top prize. "The FA has not made a particularly good start to the campaign," asserts Lee. "The FA and the Government are perceived to not always have been working in harmony and there has been controversy over the construction of the 2018 bid committee board.

"There have also been signs of friction between the Premier League and the FA. In some parts of the world, the FA is seen as a little arrogant with a sense of the "football coming home" outlook. All of this has to be countered and the bid team need to communicate a clear message of what this country will bring to the World Cup and how the rest of the world would benefit from 'England 2018'.

"In addition, some international figures feel that English football has become too successful for its own good, which means the bid needs to show that a World Cup in England can provide global impact for the good of the game and leave a lasting legacy. The bid will need a strong narrative along these lines.

"In a competitive bid situation, other nations will also have clear messages to convey. For example, the World Cup and European Championships have never been held in Russia. They can position themselves as a strong new venue for international football within a dynamic Russian marketplace.

"They have recently hosted the 2008 UEFA Champions League Final and will host the 2013 IAAF World Championships and the 2014 Winter Olympic Games. In short, internationally they are playing at the top level, but are yet to host a premier football tournament."

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