

England's World Cup bid hit as chairman quits

Roger Blitz

England's campaign to stage the 2018 Fifa World Cup was seriously damaged yesterday by the resignation of its bid chairman after a newspaper published details of a secretly taped conversation in which he said rival bidders Spain and Russia might collude to bribe World Cup referees.

Lord David Triesman, who served as a junior minister in Tony Blair's government, also resigned as chairman of the Football Association, saying the views were not meant to be taken seriously and were not shared by those in the English football hierarchy.

The Mail on Sunday quoted Lord Triesman as saying: "Spain are looking for help . . . to bribe the referees in the [2010] World Cup".

Lord Triesman, 66, suggested that Spain, which has a joint bid with Portugal for the 2018 World Cup, could then pull out of the bidding and swing its support by the Russian bid, the newspaper alleged.

In an attempt to salvage English football's reputation, the English FA hastily sent letters of apology to the Russian and Spanish FAs and to Fifa, the world governing body.

Coming less than a month from the start of the World Cup in South Africa, the revelations will be particularly badly received at Fifa, which in the past has had to fend off allegations of corruption in World Cup bidding processes. After emergency talks, the FA issued a statement, saying Lord Triesman had resigned from both his roles.

Lord Triesman said: "A private conversation with someone whom I thought to be a friend was taped without my knowledge and passed to a national newspaper . . . in that conversation I commented on speculation circulating about conspiracies around the world. Those comments were never intended to be taken seriously as indeed is the case with many private conversations.

"The views expressed were not the views of the 2018 bid board or the FA. Nobody should be under any misapprehension that the FA or 2018 bid board are disrespectful of other nations or Fifa and I regret any such inference that may have been drawn from what has been reported."

His resignation comes just two days after David Beckham joined him at Fifa's headquarters in Zurich to hand over England's official bid in Zurich.

Russia and the Spain/Portugal bid are England's main rivals to be 2018 host. The 24 executive committee members of Fifa, which says bidders must not talk about rivals, will make their decision in December, when it will also decide the host nation for 2022.

England's bid has been troubled by internal friction and resignations, and doubts about the leadership of Lord Triesman, but was thought to have been back on track and beginning to gather momentum.

Brazil is to stage the 2014 World Cup and Fifa is already worried about a lack of progress in its preparations. England bid leaders believed they could gather support from Fifa members seeking a less risky choice of host nation for the 2018 tournament.

Fifa is being wooed by 11 nations, but has let it be known that the 2018 tournament is likely to be held in Europe. The bidders are England, Holland/Belgium, Spain/Portugal, Russia, US, Australia, Qatar, South Korea and Japan.

Russia, seen as England's principal rival, could be the main beneficiary of the crisis in England's bid.

Field of dreams

Bid rivals Russia, US, Australia, Qatar, South Korea, Japan, Holland/ Belgium, Spain/Portugal, Who decides Fifa's executive committee of 24 members - president, eight vice-presidents and 15 members from associations and confederations Decision date December 2 2010 The favourites Members will vote on hosts for 2018 and 2022 World Cups. Fifa is likely to restrict the field for 2018 to Europe. Russia is England's main rival. Australia and the US are frontrunners for the 2022 tournament.

Fonte: Financial Times, London, May 17th 2010, UK, online.

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