

Running world football

Bin Hammam tackles Blatter

After 13 years in possession, soccer's global boss faces a challenge

FOOTBALL is played by the young but ruled by the old. Sepp Blatter, president of FIFA, the game's global governing body, since 1998, is 75. His immediate predecessor lasted 24 years and retired at 82; the chap before him served 13 years and was ousted at 79. Mr Blatter does not believe his work is quite done. On June 1st he hopes to win another four-year term, which he promises will be his last.

Unusually, someone stands in his path to goal: Mohamed Bin Hammam, the Qatari head of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) and something of a stripling at 6ft. Another tackler, Grant Wahl, an American journalist, has some good ideas but no chance at all. He has yet to secure the single nomination he needs from any of the 208 national associations that make up FIFA'S membership and will have one vote each in June.

Commercially, under Mr Blatter FIFA has done well. It counts its money in four-year cycles-between World Cups-and in the most recent, ending in 2010, it raked in revenue of \$4.2 billion, up from \$2.6 billion in 2003-06. More than \$2.4 billion came from television and \$1.1 billion from marketing rights, almost all of it related to last year's World Cup.

With more coming in, more can be handed out. In the last cycle the federation spent \$794m on "development projects". This included one-off payments of \$550,000 for each national body and \$5m for each of the six regional confederations (eg, the AFC). TO officials from small, poor countries, that is a lot of money. It also included \$120m under a programme called Goal. Projects range from renovating pitches to "strength-

ening of administrations".

In other respects, FIFA is a laughing stock, or worse. Mr Blatter is given to lewd remarks about female footballers and clownish ones about homosexual fans, FIFA is still dithering about using video technology to assist referees, long after other sports adopted it. But it rushed to outlaw snoods (neck-warmers) on the field: Mr Blatter feared that a player might be strangled. Meanwhile, match-fixing, or the suspicion of it, too often stains the game FIFA is supposed to govern.

Administrative scandal frequently attaches itself to FIFA. The most recent outbreak concerned the procedure for deciding where to stage the World Cup. In principle this is simple: FIFA'S 24-man executive committee decides. In practice it is murky. Allegations of log-rolling, though denied, plagued the voting last year for 2018 and 2022 (Russia and Qatar were chosen). In November FIFA banned two committee members who had told undercover reporters they would be swayed by promises of cash for football pitches and a sports academy. The federation seemed angrier with the journalists than with its fallen officials.

The Goal programme may help not just Mr Blatter, because Mr Bin Hammam chairs the committee that hands out money for it. He says he wants voting on World Cups to be "transparent"-but insists FIFA is not corrupt. He also says he might seek only one term: that may allow Michel Platini, head of UEFA, the European confederation, to succeed in 2015 and so may win European support. Mr Bin Hammam might yet gain possession. But Mr Blatter will be hard to stop.