



The Danish women's football team believe that IOC has shown itself unfit to protect athletes from Chinese police and officials at next month's Olympics

Photograph: AFP/Getty

SPIES ON THE WALL



ESPIONAGE

Fifa implicated in alleged cover-up of Chinese spying and harassment during women's World Cup last September

THE IOC Ethics Committee has refused to investigate complaints that Fifa president Sepp Blatter, an IOC member, allowed Chinese officials to get away with a campaign of harassment against women players at the World Cup last year.

The incidents, aimed at disrupting preparations by the Danish team for their game against China, culminated in officials attempting to secretly video the women through a two-way mirror.

China's first game in the tournament last September was against the highly-ranked Danes. Midfielder Anne Dot Eggers said: "Chinese officials were videoing our league games in Denmark earlier in the year. That's OK but when we arrived at our training pitch in Wuhan the grass hadn't been cut – and never was.

"Something new happened every day and you started thinking, this is not normal. One morning we arrived to find a hole a metre wide had been dug in the middle of the pitch."

Eggers, a veteran of more than 100 international matches, continued: "At one practice session a brass band arrived at the edge of the pitch. They played drums and trumpets so loudly we couldn't hear our coach's instructions."

The team's training sessions were open to the public – except for the final one. "We were practising set-pieces when we spotted a man filming us from

a block of flats," said Anne. "We got Fifa officials to move him. Then we spotted a second guy filming us rehearsing corner kicks. Fifa didn't do anything so we stopped practising and just ran around giving him the finger."

The day before their game with China the team planned a tactics talk in a seminar room at the Howard Johnson hotel. "Our officials saw a black mirror on the back wall and were joking, do you think something is going on in there?" recalled Anne.

"They looked hard and saw movement. The hotel manager was called to unlock the door and inside were two men with video cameras.

"They tried to get out with their cameras and had to be held back by our officials. Then policemen turned up and got the two guys away. It seemed they were protecting them."

But the Danish women had their own video camera – and caught the embarrassed spies on tape shouting: "No camera, no camera."

It was a tough game. China took a two-goal lead, Eggers pulled one back with her head in the 51st minute and then referee Dianne Ferreira-James from Guyana, nominated by Fifa vice-president Jack Warner's regional confederation, handed out two yellow cards to the Danes. They pulled equal in the 87th minute, only to be beaten by another Chinese goal a minute later.

Danish coach Kenneth Heiner-Moller refused to shake hands with China's coach after the game. He declined to say why, adding: "We have made an official complaint to Fifa about things that happened prior to the match."

That didn't do him any good. Fifa spokesman Nicolas Maingot announced that Heiner-Moller was suspended for the two remaining Danish games – later he was reinstated for their final match against Brazil.

Danish Association chairman Allan Hansen said: "It is grotesque that two Chinese men can sit behind a mirror and videotape the Danish women's team. I am in no doubt that Fifa and the Chinese police know who they are."

A spokesman for the Chinese football association denied the spying. "We heard about this but after an investigation it was found there was no such incident," he said.

After a private meeting with Danish officials Fifa announced that the spying was "not a sporting matter". The Danish press disagreed and demanded answers from Blatter.

He replied: "This case results from a clear security failure. Measures have been taken and implemented in order that such an incident does not happen again.

"Regarding the Olympic Games in Beijing, I do trust that all measures have already been planned by the competent bodies."

Fifa claimed they couldn't get the Chinese police to tell them who had been arrested so "the episode is between the police and the hotel". And that was the end of the matter.

But not for Eggers and two team members. "This was ridiculous. Everybody knew it was a sporting matter. Why else were those guys spying

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on us?" argued Anne. So they wrote to Fifa general secretary Jerome Valcke, asking him to put the harassment their team suffered on the agenda of the Fifa Women's Committee.

The reply came from Christian Unger. "Please note that Fifa cannot reply to matters of such sensitive nature in email form. Given the significance of the concerns raised in your correspondence, we kindly advise you to forward your email to the Danish association so that they may formalise your complaints through the appropriate channels."

Danish association general secretary Jim Stjerne Hansen backed Fifa and rejected their complaint. The women decided to lodge a complaint with the IOC's Ethics Commission because of the upcoming Olympics in China and because Fifa president Blatter, an IOC member, had refused to investigate.

The IOC refused to get involved, referring them to Fifa's independent Ethics Commission and claiming there was no complaint against IOC member Blatter. The women replied, saying that they suspected that Blatter had personally closed the investigation.

The IOC wasn't listening. It insisted there wasn't a complaint against Blatter – even though there was – and that Fifa has the jurisdiction – even though it refuses to act.

"If they can't give us athletes security at the World Cup in China, what will happen at the Olympics?" asks Anne. "It's also about equality. If it had happened to a male team, this case wouldn't have been dead."

See video of the 'Spies' caught in flagrante – and pictures of the harassment at www.transparencysport.org