



Ethics committee chairman Lord Sebastian Coe has chosen to be absent from FIFA's annual congress in Sydney as corruptions stories persist

Photograph: Andrew Wong/Getty

COE STAYS CLEAR



FIFA

Amid stories of bribery at the top, Andrew Jennings wonders why Lord Coe will be absent from its congress

FIFA's congress opens in the Sydney Opera House on Thursday and, as Sepp Blatter likes to say the whole family of football will be there. Er, not quite. They haven't booked a room for one crucial member.

The SFA and 207 other associations will be on the waterfront witnessing Blatter kicking-off his campaign to be re-appointed President in 2011.

There's only two more congresses left for him to assure his assembled blazers they'll continue getting big "development" cheques with light-touch auditing plus the usual bundles of World Cup tickets.

But where's Lord Seb Coe, the chair of Fifa's Ethics Committee? I can't see his name on the guest list. With scandal again engulfing Fifa, shouldn't Seb should be up on the podium reporting on his investigations?

The European press buzzes with the revelations in March in the criminal court in Zug in Switzerland that grotesque amounts of bribes were paid by the marketing company ISL – who held the television rights

to the football World Cup – to sports officials.

Court procedure in Zug is for one of the three judges to interrogate the defendants. From the press benches I watched Judge Marc Siegwart accusing six executives of paying around £70 million in bribes. Ashamed, they admitted it.

Most of the money had gone to some senior names at Fifa, the well-dressed blazers who award these multi-billion dollar contracts.

A company belonging to two blazers was named in the 228-page indictment. They were "the big potatoes", one of the investigating team whispered to me. Another executive committee blazer was named. Payments were channelled through hard-to-investigate offshore companies and trusts, organised by ISL's black bag man, Jean-Marie Weber.

He admitted this but declined to say who got kickbacks. It was a matter of honour, said Weber.

One ISL executive who came clean was former chief executive officer

Christoph Malms. His lawyer Werner Wurgler told the judges that two Fifa executives had warned Malms that if Weber was fired, "It would be bad for ISL".

Who issued the ultimatums? Former President Havelange and his successor, Joseph Blatter, Wurgler explained to the court.

Another intriguing story was the saga of Sicureta, an offshore account into which ISL had poured £3 million.

It was managed by Swiss lawyer Guido Renggli, who told investigators the money was withdrawn by Weber, sometimes as much as £500,000 a time, always in cash.

Mr Renggli added that he was taken to Paris in 1998 by Weber to meet the newly-elected Fifa president Blatter and watch a World Cup match.

The verdict in the ISL case is expected in July.

Has ethics supremo Lord Coe interrogated Fifa blazers about these allegations? He might also ask why former general secretary Urs Linsi was left last summer with eight years' salary – around £4 million. He was only appointed in December 2002. Has he signed a gagging clause?

Lord Coe will surely have investigated the allegations in a New York court, and reported last October by me on BBC Panorama, that in a tussle with the MasterCard company, some-

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body at Fifa appeared to have forged a crucial document. The judge thought it likely.

And she wasn't happy with top blazer, New Yorker Chuck Blazer who spoke up for Fifa. "Mr Blazer's testimony is rejected as fabricated," she ruled.

A similar view was taken of a team of Fifa blazers who gave evidence. Fifa paid \$90 million to settle the case. Lord Coe will surely want to know, was it ethical to waste so much Fifa cash?

The Sydney congress will make North Korea's politburo look like a hothouse of democratic debate and dissent.

If I wasn't the only reporter in the world banned from Fifa gatherings I'd be watching for the suave performance of Franco Carraro, long-time member of the IOC and head of Fifa's Internal Audit committee. You'll recall Signor Carraro. He vacated the presidency of the Italian football federation in 2006 during the bent referees and match rigging disclosures.

Last October Lord Coe said, "I took on the Ethics Committee role because I am a long-standing, passionate football fan, and I believe I have an opportunity to make a difference and influence the governance of the sport."

Unfortunately Lord Coe has chosen not to attend the FIFA congress.

Instead he'll be guest speaker at a Salvation Army dinner in Kingston Jamaica.