

THE PARTY LINE



FROM THE TOUCHLINE

It would be unrealistic to ban players from touching alcohol but they must be responsible, writes Mark McGhee

AT Christmas one year when I was at Celtic, around 1988, Pat Bonner and I were invited to take part in a demonstration at George Square. The demonstration was to highlight the plight of political prisoners in the then USSR. Having been horrified by Alexander Solzhenitsyn's Gulag Archipelago, which describes Stalin's persecution and internment of political and academic prisoners, I decided to go along. Big Pakky came along to keep me company.

We were each asked to stand on a podium in front of about 200 people and read out a list of prisoners' names. The Russian names had been written out phonetically to make it easier for us to read.

As I read I looked out over the heads of the crowd and was shocked to see someone dressed as Freddy Starr's Hitler marching up and down, Nazi-style, at their backs. When I saw he was being encouraged by Al Jolson, Freddy Mercury, Darth Vader and the pope, I realised it was our Celtic team-mates on their way to the Christmas night out. They were persuaded to move on by one of Strathclyde's finest and no harm was done.

After our gig, Big Pakky and I donned our fancy dress outfits – me as He-Man, the big man as a goalkeeper – and joined up with the other lads.

We went on to have the usual raucous night out during which some had too much to drink and others had too much to say, resulting in the odd altercation and a couple

of lads with a little more than bruised egos.

It's no different today. Players look forward to the Christmas night out. Last year at Motherwell, I cancelled the Christmas party and was, of course, ridiculed by the players for being a scrooge. I allowed them a small private party with their wives and girlfriends, which I attended. My ban was not about the damage that they might inflict on their livers but was out of concern for their safety when out drinking as a group in the public domain. Footballers out on the town are a target. Of course, players are often their own worst enemies and are not without blame.

If I could have my way, no player would drink any alcohol. But how could I police such a sanction? Instead I try to educate our players as to the dangers and their responsibilities to represent their clubs and their profession at all times. Professional football is not just a job, it's a lifestyle.

I am in no doubt that if I had never touched alcohol as a player then I would have achieved even more than I did.

Every manager has his code of conduct that he expects his players to adhere to, the club rules. Within these he has the opportunity to impose rules which restrict when a player is allowed out socially and when he should be at home with his feet up preparing for training or the next match. He must then rely on the players to keep the rules. He must rely on trust; after all, the player could still have a few at home.

That it still comes back to trust further convinces me that education at an early age is the best form of prohibition. In our academies we are working with young boys on their fitness, their skill, speed and strength but we are also teaching social responsibility. We teach them about the benefits of a disciplined lifestyle and the rewards that they can earn through one. There are many super role models for them in the modern game and we encourage them to follow their examples.

When football players sign professional contracts there are a lot of clauses that are not written down. In signing, they sacrifice the rights to participate in certain activities, they accept lifestyle restrictions and they commit to a code of discipline which, if compromised, contradicts all that their profession should represent.

We are privileged to work in the football industry. I left Our Lady's High Cumbernauld in May 1973 and have been earning my living from this great game ever since. Is it really 35 years? If any of my former class mates read this, let me assure you: you are older than you think.

Football remains a brilliant career, but it comes at a price. I think that self-discipline and commitment to a healthy lifestyle is a small price to pay.



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The dress code for Rangers' Christmas night out in Liverpool last week was different colours. Kenny Miller models his yellow outfit

Photograph: Neil Jones

Olympic hero turns street-party into real bash

THE INSIDER ANDREW JENNINGS

THE Olympic Movement's latest poster boy, Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko, had his riot police administer a traditional Minsk-style kicking last Wednesday to citizens on the streets attempting to celebrate world Human Rights Day.

In Belarus human rights are as important as in China – perhaps explaining why Europe's Olympic Committees recently honoured Lukashenko – as we revealed here last week – for “his outstanding contribution to the Olympic movement”.

Thursday wasn't a much better day for Lukashenko's sporting image. Two Belarus hammer-throwers were stripped of their Beijing silver and bronze medals after testing positive for more testosterone than a billy goat on Viagra. We won't be seeing

one of them ever again – it was his second offence. He rooms in the Belarus gulag from Monday.

The banning of these dopers was all over the internet – except on the site of the Belarus Olympic Committee. Their top story was the tasteful blue and white Olympic diploma awarded to their leader.

I've failed for a second week to prise a comment from Dublin's Pat Hickey, the IOC member who appears to have dreamed up this award to the thuggish Lukashenko. I've tried to reach him at his Rome office, his Dublin office and the IOC office in Lausanne. It seems that at crisis time, Hickey doesn't have access to e-mail or a mobile phone.

The British Olympic Association has pulled up the drawbridge at their Wandsworth HQ for a second week and are practising omerta. If they can't explain their role in this affair, what hope they could pick a football team for the London Olympics?

I asked a few more national Olympic committees and only one responded. Marc-André Giger of

the Swiss franchise wished me “a Wonderful Christmas and a prosperous New Year” but said they “prefer to discuss this topic first within the circle of the Olympic family, before we submit a statement to the press”.

Fair enough, Olympic transparency was never a high-rated stock. Let's hope they'll also discuss the similar honour presented by Hickey to the French Olympic official who resigned from the IOC last year after a Paris court gave him a suspended jail sentence and €20,000 fine – and just before the IOC's Ethics Commission ruled “his conduct tarnished the reputation of the Olympic Movement”.

The day the IOC Executive Board took away those druggy Belarus medals was the 10th anniversary of Swiss IOC member Marc Hodler reacting to the tidal wave of corruption allegations involving his fellow IOC members in Salt Lake City. Once Marc had confirmed to stunned reporters in Lausanne that too many of his esteemed colleagues were a bunch of greedy rip-off artists, the IOC would never be the same again.

Although I was banned for years by the IOC because I wouldn't stop alleging corruption, Marc always talked to me and although disgusted by the rackets his fellow-members pulled in Utah, he was amused by the saga of the 3-Vs. Buried in the archives of the

His riot police gave a traditional, Minsk-style kicking to citizens on streets

Salt Lake bidding team was a memo recounting a shopping list handed to an office junior by a visiting IOC deputation. Their demands? One thousand dollars' worth of Viagra, a violin costing \$524 and ... a \$74.27 vibrator. What kind of party was it? And was it drug-tested?

I HAD hoped that the imminence

of Christmas and their executive committee meeting might tempt Fifa and Jack Warner to answer a question that's been troubling me. Back in 2006 I published secret reports prepared for Fifa by auditors Ernst & Young revealing that vice-president Warner and his son Daryan had illicitly acquired 5,400 tickets for the 2006 Germany World Cup and then sold them at stupendous profits to package tour operators.

There's no way Sepp Blatter would allow touting Jack to be tossed out of Fifa. But I got hold of some confidential documents revealing that Fifa's executive committee had fined Daryan \$1 million “to compensate for the profits made through the resale of 2006 Fifa World Cup tickets”. The money was to go to charity.

However, neither Fifa's latest communications director Hans Klaus, nor the Warners, will reveal if the money has been paid. Apparently I'm an “off-message” reporter so Klaus doesn't feel the need to confide in me.

I'll try again in the New Year.