

MESSI ABUSED AT AIRPORT

Barcelona star Lionel Messi was spat at by River Plate fans when making his way home from the Club World Cup final, Messi scored in the 3-0 win over River in the final in Yokohama as Barcelona won their fifth trophy of 2015, beating a team from the superstar's home country of Argentina. Barcelona were preparing to fly back to Spain from Tokyo's Narita airport when the incident occurred in passport control. According to Mundo Deportivo, members of the Barcelona team were heading through a security gate when River fans started hurling abuse at Messi, with one even spitting at the forward. A scuffle is reported to have ensued but



\$2m payment that destroyed them

Elano assaults Goa co-owner

AFP, Margao

AFP, Zurich

Sepp Blatter and Michel Platini met their downfall with a mysterious two million Swiss francs (\$2 million, 1.8 million euros) transfer in 2011 from the FIFA president to his deputy.

Swiss prosecutors say it was a "disloyal payment" and have placed veteran football powerbroker Blatter under investigation.

Blatter and his ally-turned-arch-rival Platini -- both banned for eight years by FIFA on Monday -- have twisted themselves in knots trying to explain the 2011 transfer.

Unless they make successful appeals, the cash has destroyed two glittering sporting careers.

Blatter has said that from 1999 -- after he had secured the FIFA presidency -- until 2002, Platini was a consultant to the world body.

The Frenchman was at the time considered a Blatter protege.

Platini told Le Monde about his talks with Blatter, who had asked "how much do you want?"

"I answered: 'one million'."

"In what? Whatever you want -- rubles, pounds, dollars," Platini quoted

Blatter as saying.

"At this time there was not yet the euro. He (Blatter) answered: 'OK one million Swiss francs a year'."

Platini told AFP in September that Blatter had informed him "that it was not initially possible to pay the totality of my salary because of FIFA's financial situation at that time".

He added: "I did not actively pursue it. I even put the matter to the side for a while, before finally requesting that the outstanding balance was paid in 2011."

Two million Swiss francs was finally paid a few weeks before Blatter was re-elected to a fourth term in 2011.

Platini backed Blatter, who had faced opposition, at the election on the understanding it would be his last term -- The Swiss official allegedly promised Platini it would be.

Platini has said the fact the payment was made close to the election is "irrelevant".

Blatter and Platini have each said there was an oral contract for the payment and insist this is legal under Swiss law and FIFA regulations.

This was rejected by the FIFA ethics court in their ruling. It said the payment had "no legal basis in the written agreement signed between" Blatter and Platini in August 1999.



Former FIFA president Sepp Blatter (L) and Michel Platini

"Neither in his written statement nor in his personal hearing was Mr Blatter able to demonstrate another legal basis for this payment. His assertion of an oral agreement was determined as not convincing and was rejected by the chamber."

Blatter has also been made a suspect for "criminal mismanagement" by Swiss prosecutors and Platini has been questioned over a role described as

between a witness and a suspect.

FIFA's ethics commission temporarily suspended both for 90 days in October.

It had turned against the president who set up the commission in a bid to improve FIFA's image and dealt a blow to Platini's hopes of becoming FIFA president when Blatter officially stands down on February 26.

FIFA officials have raised strong doubts about the cash transfer.

"Based on my knowledge, there was no written contract regulating the payment of two million Swiss francs," Domenico Scala, head of FIFA's audit commission told the Financial Times in October.

"In any normal business, there would be a written contract."

Scala said it was even more serious that there was an apparent "conflict of interest" because the deal involved two top FIFA executive members and because the money owed is not mentioned until it was paid in 2011.

"That is a serious omission, and both parties were members of FIFA's executive committee and knowingly approved each year financial statements which were incorrect by two million Swiss francs. That could be seen as falsification of the accounts."

Blatter now faces a nervous wait to see how far the Swiss charges against him go and whether he is dragged into a US investigation into football corruption.

Swiss officials have warned their case could take five years to complete.

FIFA remains in the crosshairs of prosecutors. The award of the 2018 and 2022 World Cups to Russia and Qatar respectively is still being investigated.

Police arrested Brazilian midfielder Elano Blumer late Sunday for allegedly assaulting the co-owner of rival FC Goa team after his side Chennaiyin's dramatic win in the Indian Super League final.

The former Manchester City and Galatasaray star was later released on bail, police inspector Chetan L. Patil told AFP over phone from Margao.

"A complaint was lodged by Dattaraj Salgaocar of FC Goa team after which we placed Elano under arrest," Patil said.

"He was released on bail at 2:30am (2100 GMT) on the orders of the additional sessions judge and he left for his hotel after that."

Salgaocar, the co-owner of FC Goa, claimed that Elano physically attacked him in an altercation that occurred at the home team's dugout after the final whistle.

A lawyer for Chennaiyin told local media Elano was free to leave the country on the condition that he must return to appear in court.



Lazio midfielder Antonio Candreva celebrates one of his two goals against Inter Milan during their Serie A clash at the San Siro on Sunday.

Candreva stuns Inter Mixed reaction to 8-year bans

AFP, Milan



Italy international Antonio Candreva struck twice including a late winner as Lazio stunned leaders Inter Milan 2-1 on Sunday to throw the Serie A title race

wide open.

Inter welcomed Stefano Pioli's men to the San Siro expected to restore their four-point lead on title rivals Fiorentina and Napoli after their respective wins over Chievo and Atalanta.

But despite Mauro Icardi levelling Candreva's fifth-minute opener just after the hour, Roberto Mancini's league leaders were stunned three minutes from time when Candreva hit his second to end Lazio's seven-game winless streak and bolster Pioli's bid to avoid the chop.

Inter's third defeat in 17 games left the Nerazzurri top of the pile but they now have a lead of just one point on Fiorentina and Napoli, three on champions Juventus and four on Roma, who occupy fifth spot.

AC Milan sit in sixth at eight points off the pace after Sinisa Mihajlovic's men battled to a 4-2 win away to Frosinone.

A bad-tempered finish rubbed salt into Inter's wounds, with Brazilian Felipe Melo issued a straight red card in the final minute for a spectacular karate kick on compatriot Lucas Biglia.

Moments later, Lazio midfielder Sergej Milinkovic-Savic was also issued his marching orders, for a second bookable offence.

In what was the final Serie A game of 2015, Inter's largely unexpected defeat should already have fans champing at the bit for the resumption of hostilities in two weeks' time.

In Florence, Nikola Kalinic broke the deadlock in the 20th minute and strike partner Josip Ilicic doubled Fiorentina's lead with a fine dipping strike to secure their 11th win of the campaign.

Atalanta, who stunned Roma 2-0 in the

Italian capital a fortnight ago, had pledged to make life hard for Napoli in Bergamo.

But seven minutes into the second half Napoli captain Marek Hamsik beat Davide Bassi from the penalty spot and although Atalanta pulled level two minutes later thanks to Alejandro Gomez's low strike, Gonzalo Higuain restored the visitors' lead with a flicked-on header that beat Davide Bassi at the keeper's near post.

Napoli's Brazilian midfielder Jorginho saw red for a studs-up challenge, but Higuain put the result beyond doubt when he powered down the right and held off his marker to beat Bassi with an angled strike that stretched his goals tally to 16 from 17 games. Higuain paid tribute to Napoli coach Maurizio Sarri when he told Sky Sport: "Few teams have come here and played well, but we did -- you can see from the result."

"I'm happy for the goals, I'm working hard and if I'm feeling good then it's all down to the coach, to the club and to my teammates."

Edin Dzeko was sent off for dissent in the second half at the Stadio Olimpico, when Alessandro Florenzi's close-range volley gave embattled Roma a 42nd minute lead against Genoa.

But 18-year-old Nigerian Umar Sadiq, who replaced Mohamed Salah eight minutes from the end, eased any late nerves when he ghosted in at the back post to head past Mattia Perin to score his maiden Serie A goal and spark wild Roma celebrations.

The 2-0 win ended a four-game winless streak for Rudi Garcia's men.

Florenzi followed his goal by hugging under-fire Garcia, who said afterwards: "Of course we're emotional, but it shows how important it was for us to give it everything tonight to try and win this game."

"We went down to 10 men for the last 15-20 minutes, so the lads deserve all the credit for holding on and coming up with the second goal."

AFP, Zurich



The eight year bans handed down to disgraced football chiefs Sepp Blatter and Michel Platini received mixed reactions on Monday.

Some felt the former heads of FIFA and UEFA had got off lightly, while others criticised the length of the suspensions as too "harsh".

Former Asian Football Confederation (AFC) general secretary Peter Velappan, who occupied that position when Asia hosted its first ever World Cup in South Korea and Japan in 2002, said the length of the bans was like a "death sentence".

"This is very harsh, especially for Blatter because he dedicated his life to football and FIFA," said Velappan.

"It's unfortunate that the bribery scandal happened and you can't take away the blame from him either but still, eight years is too harsh. Eight years is like a death sentence."

Velappan backed the pair's record in boosting football in Asia and said that should have been taken into consideration.

"Blatter and Platini are football personalities and you have to look at the contributions they have made to the game," he added.

"A one or two-year ban would have been understandable. This is very unkind."

"They have both done a lot for the AFC and football."

However, for Spanish Football League president Javier Tebas, the bans should have been longer.

"Eight years, that doesn't seem much to me. Platini's sanction... is due to the fact that they didn't respect the normal FIFA internal procedures," he said.

"Bypassing economic controls is very serious and the sanction should ensure they can never again exercise power in a sporting institution."

"They no longer deserve the confidence of the world of football and sportsmen."

For English football icon David Beckham, this episode should be used as an opportunity to implement vital reforms in the game.

But the former Manchester United and Real Madrid star remains upbeat about the future.

"I'm sure at some point there will be a huge amount of change at FIFA," he said.

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QUANDARY
(noun) a state of perplexity or uncertainty over what to do in a difficult situation.

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