

FIFA PRESIDENT JOSEPH S. BLATTER
OXFORD UNIVERSITY UNION SPEECH, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 25TH

Ladies and gentlemen, scholars of Oxford, it is truly an honour to stand here before you today in the city of dreaming spires.

This great institution and the many talented young people that pass through its doors rightly have my respect.

Many aspire to come here, but only a few are lucky to get the chance.

Life is all about what we do with the chances we are given, but also the chances that we create for ourselves.

And I wanted to start today with a story about chance.

It is the story of one of the biggest disappointments in my life.

As you might have expected, I love football and I was football-mad as a boy.

Like lots of young men and women, it was my dream to represent my country... Perhaps even at the FIFA World Cup.

I played whenever and wherever I could.

Kicking a ball against a wall if I had no one else to play with, coming in late for my dinner...

I wasn't bad either. I knew if I worked hard enough and practised I could make something of myself.

I could create that chance.

And I did.

Every young footballer longs for the call of a club, that chance to show what you can do.

When I was 18, I made it. All those hours practising and learning, trying to make the best of my ability, had paid off.

I was offered a professional contract by Lausanne Sport.

Lausanne was one of the very top clubs in Switzerland at that time.

For a boy who grew up in the remote Swiss mountains it was like being offered a career by Arsenal, Manchester United or Liverpool.

I can't describe how it felt to have that contract in my hands.

It was like a whole new world was about to rise up before my eyes.

I was excited and nervous, but ready to make the most of this chance.

But I never got that chance.

I lost it just as I was allowing myself to dream of what might be.

My father was a traditional, hard-working man.

I loved him greatly, but we had different views on the way the world was going.

He refused to sign that contract.

He told me there was no future in football.

It was not a sensible way to make living.

What if you got injured? What if you lost form?

Better to have a career you can depend on.

As you can imagine I was heartbroken.

It was a time when Switzerland was hosting the 1954 FIFA World Cup.

There was football fever everywhere.

Footballing giants from across the world – Brazil, Uruguay, West Germany, England, Hungary...

Santos! Schiaffino! Morlock! Lofthouse! Puskas!

Against that backdrop, it hurt even more, to see right there before my eyes what might have been.

I still sometimes wonder what might have been.

It was a hard lesson to learn.

But without disappointments, there would be very little to learn from life.

Disappointments make us stronger and wiser.

They can be opportunities in themselves.

And I have learnt that there is more to the world of football than just playing.

As I look at you all today, it is like gazing into tomorrow' s world.

Society looks to you as the leaders of the future in politics, industry, the arts, sport and beyond.

This expectation must not be treated lightly.

It brings with it a responsibility that can weigh heavily.

You may not please everyone.

You may not always make the right choices.

And life may not always turn out as you want it to.

But that weight of expectation will also drive you to do your best.

To recognise that any opportunity you get must be guided by a sense of duty.

A duty to yourselves and a duty to the world.

I am grateful to you for this opportunity to be here today as part of this fine Union' s tradition of open debate.

I do not often get the chance to speak directly to a British audience... well, not without the help of the flattering mirror of the British media.

I treasure this chance to show you who I am, and what FIFA really stands for, beyond the headlines and the spin.

One falsehood I must address is this idea that we at FIFA have something against the United Kingdom and its people.

My love for the United Kingdom and its culture and heritage is rock solid.

It runs throughout my life.

Anyone like me who is passionate about politics looks to the Mother of all Parliaments in Westminster and this nation' s vibrant political history.

Anyone like me who loves sport looks to Wembley, to Twickenham, to Lords and Wimbledon.

And anyone like me who is inspired by the arts or education looks to Shakespeare and Wordsworth, to Oxford and, well, I have been advised not to mention the other Blue.

And, yes, anyone like me who believes in the values of a free and vibrant media looks to the British press – even if the outcome sometimes makes me question this belief!

The United Kingdom has contributed so much to our world, and so much to mine.

FIFA and I are great admirers and friends of this nation, its people ... and its football.

This is the birthplace of association football. And what a history of great players, great teams ...

Manchester United... Liverpool... Spurs... Arsenal... Celtic... Rangers.

And you share your love of these teams with fans all over the world.

British football is truly global. Bringing people together and breaking down barriers.

But there is more.

We applaud the strong stand you have taken against the scourge of racism in football and in society.

We celebrate with you the success of the Premier League in raising the profile of football across the world and driving the game forward.

And we work hand-in-hand with the International Football Association Board – England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales – to decide the laws of the game in football.

To be an active part of that footballing heritage and that history is one of the greatest honours of my life.

To be here today is another.

This incredible university and its renowned Union have etched their names in history.

This is a place of ideas.

A place to be treasured where we can meet, speak freely and learn from one another and from the great canon of minds that have made their mark here.

Just like football, debate has this awesome power to bring people together.

Debate opens our minds to new worlds. It challenges our prejudices. It inspires.

Just like football, debate has the power to break down barriers.

It makes us better people and it makes the world a better place.

I have heard you are a very warm and generous audience.

But I have also known you can give as good as you get.

Well, I am no stranger to a tough audience on these shores.

The British media and FIFA have, what we might call, an *interesting* relationship.

With that in mind, I will try not to disappoint you.

I hope to entertain, to open your eyes to the real world of FIFA and to encourage you above all to dream, to work hard for yourself and for others, and to shine in whatever path you take.

To be brave, to turn opportunity into something positive for you and, perhaps, for the world.

You may have already grown used to living and studying here in Oxford.

Your senses may have dimmed just a little to the stunning architecture, the inspiring atmosphere and the reputation of excellence and its past and present greats.

But for those who come here as visitors, it still has such a powerful impact.

We are in awe. It puts things into perspective. It reminds us of our mortality.

Where do we fit in? What can we achieve in the small time we are on this earth? What lies ahead? What must we do to get there?

I almost never had the chance to do anything in life, to never chase my dreams, to never love or lose.

I very nearly did not make it past birth.

I was born two months early in 1936, in the heart of the Swiss alps.

A premature birth is always a risk, even in today' s advanced medical world.

But in the 1930s, being born prematurely usually only meant one thing.

Even then, as a helpless baby struggling for life, there were some people who were against me.

My grandmother advised my mother to let me go.

To not try to save me because it was not worth the trouble.

Even if I were to survive, the risk of complications was extremely high.

And those complications would have made life even harder for a rural family like my own, already struggling to make ends meet.

Looking back, perhaps some of my friends in the British media might have agreed wholeheartedly with my grandmother.

Maybe some would have written columns encouraging my mother to listen to the well-prepared bid from her mother, and to ignore her own conscience.

But my grandmother was to underestimate my mother... and me.

I am a fighter and my mother was too.

She did not give in.

And I learnt, like my mother, that you should never give up on what you believe in.

I was given that chance at life. And I like to think I have grasped it with both hands.

I was born early, and you could say I have always been a little bit precocious, always trying to push on, to innovate...

In school, I realised that I could understand what the children in the year above me were being taught.

I realised I could do their work and I wanted to move up a year.

My father told me to ask the teacher myself, to stand up for what I wanted.

So I did. And it paid off. One year less in school...

There may be a few of you here who got away with that too.

It is important to go for it in life. No one else can do it for you.

You have to take a leap of faith, faith in yourself, faith in your values and faith in the world.

That optimistic spirit has helped me to achieve some of my biggest dreams.

While I lost my chance at playing football, I never gave up on football.

My love for football was always there and it is that love of football that has shaped so much of my life.

It is my deep love for the game that gave me the drive and then the opportunity to work for FIFA and to eventually become its President.

Contrary to what you might have heard, it is a job I give my heart and soul to.

It has not been without cost, but it is a job I feel so privileged to have.

Football has always been everything to me.

Married to the job. Married to football.

Also married in my private life, and blessed with a wonderful daughter.

But I have very few regrets. And I feel lucky to have come so far from those early days of struggle and disappointment.

Lucky enough to have served a lifetime dedicated to the greatest sport on the planet.

No, not rugby, not cricket ... Association football.

Lucky enough to be there in the crowd when history is made at the greatest show on earth.

No, not the Varsity boat race, not Glastonbury... The FIFA World Cup.

I expect you all might have an opinion of me, or of FIFA.

It is difficult to work at the top of any industry without people having their views, without making some enemies as well as friends.

And you will know for yourselves that our enemies often have the loudest voices.

I hope your education has taught you to have a healthy scepticism of what you hear and read.

I hope you have learned to recognise the vested interests, the bias and sometimes wilful ignorance.

I hope you have learned to judge things on your own terms, knowledge and experience, to seek and recognise the truth.

To walk the path less trod.

Perhaps you think you know who I am, what FIFA is, what we do.

Perhaps you think I am a ruthless parasite sucking the lifeblood out of the world and out of football! The Godfather of the FIFA gravy train! An out-of-touch, heartless schmoozer!

There are not many names that the media haven't thrown at me in the last few years.

And I would be lying to you if it did not hurt, even if you know that it goes with the territory.

You would have to have a heart of stone for it not to hurt.

You ask yourself, what have I done? Why has it come to this?

Is FIFA to blame for everything? Are we not just a football organisation working for the good of the game? How did it come to this?

People like a scapegoat, of course, but how could things have become so twisted?

As you can see, I am not some overbearing bully who can intimidate my critics with one look and strong arm governments to my will.

But sometimes it feels like all that unsung, good work FIFA is working to achieve through investing in football and communities around the world has been washed away in the thoughtless swipe of the pen.

I know I am far from perfect and that we at FIFA must always look to get better at what we do.

We have worked to push through tough reforms to improve the way FIFA operates, to make us more accountable and more transparent.

To build up our defences against wrong doing and poor business practices.

And we know that we have been let down by the actions of a few in the football world who have tarnished FIFA's good name and overshadowed all the good work we do.

We know there is fair criticism that we must listen to and we do.

We know we have had some dark days.

But, honestly, some of the criticism just astounds me.

And that is what hurts, to know that it is not true. And not fair.

That it is easier to plant an idea than it is to change it.

That it is easier for people to sustain a stereotype than to admit things are changing or that they have got it wrong.

When you leave these hallowed surroundings and dive into the mystery and trials of life, you will soon find that people's opinions of you rarely reflect the truth.

Some may exaggerate your strengths and your achievements.

Some may exaggerate your weaknesses and your failings.

You will wonder why. It will hurt when people get you wrong.

But you must learn to look beyond this hall of mirrors in which you see yourself and in which the world sees you.

You will eventually realise that these mirrors are but a strange reflection of reality, of what you and others want to see, but not reality itself.

There will always be doubters. There will always be sycophants.

People who are guided by their prejudices and naked ambitions, and will do anything to get their way.

And there will always be those who make fair criticism and deserve your ear.

In time, you will learn to accept the criticism when it is fair and to dismiss the flattery and the poison.

Perhaps you will learn one day to be your own best critic and to focus wholly on your mission in life.

With hard work, perseverance and a good heart, you will make progress.

I am here today to challenge your perceptions of me and of FIFA.

How we as a society form opinions of events and institutions and how our perceptions of the world are shaped, often beyond our control.

Today, I want to let you into some of the biggest kept secrets in the world of sport.

The work that FIFA actually does.

You will have heard that the world of FIFA is one of secrets and intrigue.

Well, today, I am going to open the door to this mysterious world: the hidden ways and clandestine operations of Sepp Blatter and the world's governing body of football.

You are going to get the exclusive.

Today you will hear things you probably will not believe.

Things that might influence your view of FIFA, and me, forever.

You may think you know who I am. What I stand for. What I am like.

All those names. All that rumour. All that criticism.

You may think you know what FIFA is. What it does. What it aspires to be.

A faceless machine printing money at the expense of the beautiful game, with me pulling the strings and laughing all the way to the bank.

There are those who will tell you that football is just a heartless, money-spinning game or just a pointless kick about on the grass.

There are those who will tell you that FIFA is just a conspiracy, a scam, accountable to nobody and too powerful for anyone to resist.

There are those who will tell you of the supposed sordid secrets that lie deep in our Bond villain headquarters in the hills above Zurich, where we apparently plot to exploit the unfortunate and the weak.

They would have you believe that I sit in my office with a sinister grin, gently stroking the chin of an expensive, white Persian cat as my terrible sidekicks scour the earth to force countries to host the World Cup and to hand over all of their money.

You might laugh.

It is strange how fantasy so easily becomes confused with fact.

And it feels almost absurd to have to say this.

But that is not who we are. Not FIFA. Not me.

I have dedicated my life for the good of football around the world, in the belief that football has the power to build a better future.

FIFA exists to develop the game for all around the world. Not to exploit it.

Because we love the game, recognise its power and feel a strong duty to society.

Even though I did not make it as a professional footballer, I did not give up on football.

I played as an amateur for 30 years in Switzerland, and I still have the bruises to show for it.

And I have spent the last four decades working to develop football all over the world for all those who want to play, to entertain and unite people through football and to make football the number one sport in the world.

I wanted to give something to society. Not to take.

I chose football because I could see something greater in a football than just a game of 11 a side.

I could see that football has a power that goes beyond the game.

I knew that football could help those with nothing rise up and dream.

And I know what it is to come from nothing.

I know how important it is to inspire and to encourage people to see beyond.

Switzerland in the 1930s was not the Switzerland you see today.

Life in rural Switzerland and life for my family in the small, Alpine town of Visp was not all that easy.

Like so many others in our town, my father worked hard to provide for us, to give us a chance in life.

He gave up long hours of his own life in a chemical plant so that we could have a better future.

We even had to grow our own fruit and vegetables in a small allotment to sell at market.

It was a far cry from where I am today.

But I have never forgotten those days. My father's sacrifices. Where I came from.

And that taught me what is really important in life.

Not wealth nor power nor popularity, but love, friendship, perseverance and hard work.

And, most of all, to have a vision in life.

To make things happen. To make a difference.

Football has that power and so does FIFA.

Since 1998, when I was voted in to the position of FIFA President, I have made it my priority to develop football everywhere and to use the power of football to try to make a difference.

I was FIFA's first football development officer. I have seen this investment in football grow exponentially before my eyes.

I have seen the difference that has made beyond the headlines and the cynics.

And it is the amazing success of the FIFA World Cup has allowed us to do that.

We are able to attract global broadcasters and commercial partners because of the success and appeal of that tournament.

They all want to be part of the World Cup because it is the greatest show on earth.

Contrary to what you might have heard, FIFA does not expect host nations to hand over suitcases of cash to FIFA. We do not ask for billions of dollars in public money and then bury it all in the Alps.

We take the money we receive from broadcasters and sponsors during the World Cup and we put the majority of it back into developing football around the world, running and governing the global game, staging all our other football tournaments and into social projects to help communities.

We have nothing to hide. We publish our audited financial report, like all other responsible organisations.

We are not an unscrupulous multinational company doing everything they can just for the sake of making money, selling products that do you harm, exploiting people just for the sake of the profit of a few.

We pour hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars back into football every year.

That is where the money goes. That is where the money trail leads.

Just ask our member associations. Just ask the children and the communities we support through football. Just ask the dedicated people at FIFA that work hard and responsibly for the good of football and the world.

And we work hard to make the World Cup as successful as possible, not because we are greedy, but because we want to give as much back to football and society as we can.

You might have been led to believe FIFA is the evil Sherriff of Nottingham of football.

But the truth is we have more in common with Robin Hood.

Taking the money we get from our commercial partners and ploughing it back into the grassroots of the game for all to benefit.

Not just the few.

Yes, the World Cup is expensive to host. It would be dishonest to say otherwise.

It costs taxpayer dollars to invest in better stadia, better infrastructure and tourism capacity.

We hope that those investments are well-managed, good value for money and that they might lay the foundations for a brighter future.

It is a magical economic stimulus for the host country, and South Africa has proven that.

There is no doubt that there are some benefits in the tourism and construction industries.

There is no doubt that it puts the host nation and the host cities on an extraordinary platform.

But the real selling point of the World Cup is that it brings the world to your doorstep and it brings the greatest festival of football to your country.

There is nothing like it on earth. It is a magical month that binds us together.

And so what does FIFA do with its World Cup dollars?

The World Cup pays for all our other tournaments, which do not enjoy that kind of commercial platform.

The Women' s World Cup, at senior, U20 and U17 level, would not have been possible to stage without the success of the FIFA World Cup.

They are starting to blossom now, because we are dedicated to developing women's football to its full potential.

Smaller sports such as beach football and futsal would also not have their own World Cup without the FIFA World Cup.

Without all those other tournaments, football would be half the sport it is today.

And it does not stop there.

Without the FIFA World Cup, more than half of the 209 FIFA member associations around the world would struggle to survive.

Football in more than 100 nations around the world would have no formal structure.

FIFA' s equal financial support to all its members and Confederations, made possible only because of the World Cup, makes football truly global.

It gives the minnows the chance to swim with the big fish.

It gives children everywhere the chance to dream, compete and learn.

It creates opportunities. It breaks down barriers and smashes through glass ceilings in a way that only football can.

Tahiti can go to the Confederations Cup, alongside Spain and Brazil.

Iran can play the United States in a World Cup.

Israel and Palestine can come together to work together for football.

FIFA believes football is for all, no matter who or where you are.

I know some people will still feel that the World Cup is too expensive for the host country.

That is a national debate for the host nation to have.

It is also a debate for the world of football.

I have my own beliefs here and on many matters in football and the world.

I believe in solidarity.

And that is why I cannot and do not impose my will on football.

Unlike your very own Prime Minister, I cannot choose who sits around the table in my cabinet.

I cannot cherry pick my friends or allies.

FIFA's executive committee is chosen by our member associations through their confederations.

All our big decisions in football are decided by our members.

One nation, one vote.

That is how it should as it means all voices are heard.

It means no one person is too powerful.

I am a servant of football. Not a dictator. Not the exploiter.

A servant of the global football community.

I visit as many of our members as possible, big or small, as possible every year.

To hear their concerns, to help them, to give them a voice.

That is the true spirit of democracy ... listening, understanding and reaching agreements that reflect all those voices.

Not being afraid of those voices, but being aware of the strength and inspiration that comes from solidarity.

Giving those voices a platform, a power and equal opportunity.

We reflect this spirit in all that we do, whether that is development or hosting a tournament.

Of course. FIFA cannot and would never force countries to host the World Cup.

We try to limit our impact, to give the support we can and to be sensitive to local concerns.

But we also believe all countries should have the chance to host a global tournament, not just the rich and powerful.

Because we believe in creating opportunities for all through football.

The World Cup also has a power that goes beyond football.

It sparks national debate, it gives a platform to voices.

Look at South Africa. It was an amazing experience.

A World Cup on African soil.

There were so many people saying it should not happen or it would fall apart.

But it was an incredible event in an incredible country.

It showed the world what Africa could do.

It changed people' s perceptions. And people' s prejudices.

It is my belief that football has that power. I am a football progressive

And that is why I have given my life to football, to developing football everywhere and to trying to build a better future through football... Despite all those who have tried to attack me and FIFA.

Football has become a huge industry, like so many other forms of entertainment and sports.

It is no longer a question of why this happened or whether it should have happened.

It is now a question of what we do with this opportunity that we have both been given and created.

Like all opportunities, it must be treasured and it must be treated with a sense of duty to the game and to the world.

We at FIFA are putting this opportunity to work for the good of football and in turn for the good of the world.

Whether that means fighting racism, offsetting 75 percent of the carbon emissions directly under our control (including 100% of all FIFA flights), working with social development programmes or strengthening and training those in football over the world.

This is not happening everywhere in business or industry.

This is not happening everywhere in the business of football.

But, no matter how we are perceived.

No matter what people with vested interests and axes to grind will say.

No matter what.

FIFA will persevere in our mission to put the proceeds of the World Cup to good work in developing the game of football and building a better future for all, not just a few.

Spending and redistributing resources across the world for football, helping communities in need through football, breaking down barriers and bringing people together through football.

That is what FIFA and Sepp Blatter have always been about.

For the Game. For the World.