

'Astonished' Blatter condemns Scudamore plan as an insult



By Charles Sale

Richard Scudamore's legacy to the Premier League of a 39th match for massive money was destroyed, ironically, in another monument to football wealth — FIFA's £120million space-age headquarters in the hills outside Zurich.

There, in a first-floor meeting room somewhat sparse compared to the extravagant marble-and-steel mix elsewhere in the FIFA palace, Blatter did his demolition job on 'Project Scudamore' in just 40 minutes.

When Blatter had finished talking to a handful of English journalists — which proved to be just the starting gun for his offensive against the menace of the Premier League across all media platforms — it was apparent that Scudamore's proposed International Round was no more.

And with zero chance of the FIFA president or his lieutenants across world football changing their minds, Scudamore will have to throw in the towel well over three

years earlier than the intended kick-off to the 10 Premier League games in five overseas cities in January 2011.

Blatter began by saying: 'On the one side I would say I am astonished, but definitely not surprised after working now for 33 years in football. Yet it is shattering.'

'Definitely we are out of any social responsibility as far as the English Premier League is concerned. When football is the most popular movement in the world, everyone should assume their responsibility. The Premier League says it is the best league in the world, then it should also take more responsibility.'

'To try to grasp additional exposure and revenue by expanding the league around the world, is not acceptable and it will not be acceptable to the FIFA executive committee.'

Blatter could not believe what he was reading in the media, having not been consulted until a letter from Scudamore arrived on Thurs-

day. The FIFA chief said: 'I thought the appeal to Manchester United by the Asian Football Confederation last year — over their plans to play pre-season in Malaysia — was enough to not start again. But I wonder if the clubs are really in favour or not.'

'What about the supporters? If there are additional matches then the fans in England should have the right to attend these matches.'

And Blatter, in expansive mocking mode, continued: 'Now these same teams and the same league are arguing that there are suddenly enough dates available for players to recover from all those painful championships and European competitions.'

'Now all of a sudden they have time to travel around the world. Do they think about the health of these players?'

'I come back to responsibility. It makes no sense.'

'If you are in the organisation of football and you believe football is

organised in a pyramid, and if everybody speaks about responsibility and solidarity, then I cannot understand this movement.'

'According to the statutes and regulations, it is said very clearly that if you want to play any match in a foreign territory outside the country where the teams are from, you need the authorisation of that association.'

And in a clear warning that the repercussions could be lasting Blatter added: 'England will not be the only (2018) World Cup bidder, and I cannot imagine that when you go against the deciding body for the decision on the World Cup you will enhance your chances with an initiative that will not be accepted by this body. It will not be diplomatic.'

Blatter also poured scorn on the way the Premier League is dominated by just four clubs.

'The Premier League is certainly making a lot of money, but don't forget it is composed of four teams playing for the title and 16 teams

playing not to be relegated. This is a fact.'

'One should not overdo it. If you do something too much then it will collapse. This is overdone.'

And he fired one last broadside at Rupert Murdoch's ever-growing dominance of the football TV market worldwide.

Blatter said: 'The wedding between TV and football has been profitable to football. But there must somewhere be a limit. If they are partners, then they should also feel it is not right if it is only Fox and Sky and a Murdoch organisation who have the TV football pictures.'

'Mr Murdoch should consider if he is stripping the shirt a little bit too much.'

'If you're in a partnership, you should respect the other, otherwise you are not a partner.'

'Football cannot be like the Harlem Globetrotters or a circus. You must keep the national identity of the clubs. Football is not a show.'

Liverpool to change hands again as American owners cash in



Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum

By Martin Lipton

Liverpool are poised to change hands again - by the middle of next month - as the club's US owners close in on a double-your-money offer from Dubai.

Despite denials from Tom Hicks and George Gillett, Mirror Sport understands that an outline agreement to transfer ownership of the Anfield giants to Dubai International Capital is in the pipeline.

Sources in New York have confirmed that a £460million deal with DIC - the Dubai government's financial arm and headed by Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum - is now on the verge of conclusion. Anfield fans will rejoice at the news that the two Americans' ill-starred reign is ending after a series of protests in recent weeks over their treatment of boss Rafa Benitez.

Supporters have demanded

a sale to DIC, who were jilted at the end of 2006 when the Liverpool board wrongly believed the deal with the Americans would safeguard the interests of the club. Hicks is expected to stay as part of the new club directorate in the immediate aftermath of the sale.

The effective sale price is nowhere near the ambitious £1billion valuation Mirror Sport exclusively revealed was put on the club by Hicks in November. He and Gillett paid just £219m to take control of Liverpool from David Moores a year ago.

One insider said: "These talks are still ongoing. Tom and George want to make sure they get the right price for giving up the club."

Despite leaving Liverpool with a £350m debt, they will be able to walk away having made a substantial profit.



Fabregas

Fabulous
£33 Mil
Deal

By Andrew Dillon

CESC FABREGAS will rocket to the top of Arsenal's pay league — with an amazing new deal worth £33million.

Gunners boss Arsene Wenger wants the Spaniard, 20, to commit until 2016 by signing a two-year extension to his current contract.

Fab, whose pay will go from £50,000 to £80,000 a week, said: "I have a contract until 2014 but I have been speaking to Arsenal and they want to renegotiate it."

The new deal will put Fab in line with the likes of star defender William Gallas, who took the captain's armband at the start of the season.

It will also see off interest from Barcelona — the Catalan giants said to be eyeing a summer swoop for the man who was plucked from their youth academy back in 2003.

Midfield maestro Fabregas — who has 12 goals so far this term — dismissed his old Barca side, adding: "I want to succeed at Arsenal and that the club wants me is fundamental for me."

"I am proud to be linked to Barcelona. I am from the city and have played there."

"But now I only think of winning as many titles as possible here at Arsenal."