



Barwick axed: FA lose fourth chief executive in less than 10 years

FA chief executive Brian Barwick is being dramatically ousted from Soho Square after just three years in the job.

Labour peer Lord Triesman, who has made sweeping changes since becoming the first independent chairman of the FA at the start of the year, has agreed a pay-off on Barwick's one-year rolling contract worth around £450,000-a-year. He will leave office on December 31st.

The subject was discussed at yesterday's FA board meeting, but staff at the headquarters of English football had no knowledge they were about to lose their fourth chief executive in less than 10 years.

Barwick, a former TV executive who was widely criticised for the bungled appointment of former England manager Steve McClaren, has found himself surplus to requirements in Triesman's root and branch restructuring of the FA. He did not chair the FA weekly management board meeting two days ago (Tuesday), having also missed the previous two meetings.

The writing has been on the wall for Barwick since Triesman's whirlwind arrival into football. The chairman never wanted to work with the avuncular Barwick, believing he lacked the necessary business skills to modernise the FA despite being one of the most popular and best connected figures in football.

Seasoned FA watchers realised it was only a matter of time before Barwick was forced out of office when Triesman revealed his re-structuring blueprint last May.

Not only were most of the chief executive's responsibilities hived off to the chief operating officer - the newly appointed Alex Horne, the former boss of Wembley - but Barwick had also been stripped of his

leadership of all matters to do with England.

His route to the exit door was signposted in a document outlining the FA chain of command structure when only a dotted line linked Barwick to half of the FA's business. Barwick tried to give the impression he and Triesman were a good team, but the ruthless new leader of the FA gave off different vibes whenever the two of them were seen together.

Triesman has been acting as a full-time executive chairman since taking office at Soho Square, and though his long-term plan is apparently to revert back to the original chairman's job description of a three-day week, no timescale has been given.

Barwick won't be missed by the Premier League, with whom he had a difficult relationship, but he can leave Soho Square with his head held high after a number of notable achievements, including the opening of Wembley, completing major TV and sponsorship deals that have greatly improved the FA's bank balance and the appointment of Fabio Capello as Mccalren's successor.

But ironically the Burns report recommendations, which brought him a vote for the first time on the FA board also brought in a new chairman who wanted other changes at the top of the FA as well, including Barwick's head.

He will, at least, leave Soho Square without the controversy surrounding the departure of his predecessors Mark Palios, Adam Crozier and Graham Kelly.

There is no need for the FA to rush into finding a replacement for Barwick as they already have an executive chairman and chief operating officer in position.

The FA Statement

The FA today announced that Chief Executive Brian Barwick will leave his post on 31 December 2008.

Barwick, who was appointed in January 2005, said: "This decision follows several weeks of discussions with FA Chairman Lord Triesman on the role of the Chief Executive within the new FA structure.

"I am sad to be leaving The FA - an organisation it has been a privilege to lead - but I believe it is in the best interests of all parties. I have always endeavored to do my job with passion, decency and integrity, and I believe I am leaving a strong legacy for the future.

"We have achieved a lot over the past three and a half years: opening the new Wembley Stadium, implementing the Structural Review and increasing our broadcast and commercial contracts to record income levels.

"The organisation is in better financial health than ever before, and I am also delighted to have seen the recent launch of the Respect programme, which is very important to me.

"On the pitch, I'm convinced that in Fabio Capello, the England team has the right Manager and a genuine chance of success, while I also believe the plans for the National Football Centre will benefit English football in the long term.

"I would like to pay tribute to The FA Board for their strong support, and especially thank my colleagues at The FA for their tremendous efforts during my tenure."

Lord Triesman said: "On behalf of everyone at The FA, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Brian for the stability and growth that he has brought to the organisation.

"Brian leaves with our best wishes for the future, and will always be welcome back as our guest at Wembley."

New designer gear is just a load of balls

David James

New season, new haircut, new balls. Only I wish we didn't have to have new balls. We can't seem to go a season or an international tournament these days without a new ball design being introduced. For all the impressive science jargon that accompanies them I cannot help wondering whether these so-called improvements are actually doing the game any good.

Over the summer I took part in the Free Kick Master tournament in Houston, Texas - not a location renowned for its football I know, but a chance to participate in a great concept. While I was over there the organisers brought up a statistic that got me thinking: not a single goal was scored direct from a free kick at Euro 2008. That's baffling, unbelievable even, when you think of how many free-kick specialists there are - I'll be facing a few at Stamford Bridge this afternoon.

Could it be something to do with the balls? I refuse to believe that it was brilliant goalkeeping, unusually bad free kicks, or pure coincidence. And still the manufacturers and their scientists tell us they are producing the best equipment for our game. When Adidas brought in the 'Europass' ball for Euro 2008 there were grumbles from some

goalkeepers who felt it was harder to catch, yet still no one managed to convert a free kick. Interestingly, the company projected sales of 10m balls worldwide off the back of the 2006 'Teamegeist' design alone.

It doesn't help that footballers have to play with different brands and different designs depending on which competition they are taking part in. All this chopping and changing, developing and redeveloping seems to be more about marketing gimmicks than the pursuit of great football.

Think about it. Why do we have a yellow football for the winter months? It's not because of snow - we hardly get any of that these days - and it can't be the manufacturers' argument about better visibility in lower light levels. If they seriously wanted us to have better visibility we would use a yellow ball all year round. The simple answer has to be that if you have two different coloured balls on sale then you make more money.

Boot manufacturers are no different. You ask any seasoned pro - off the record - what their favourite boots are and most of them will name that 1970s design classic, the Copa Mundial. Yet in the Premier League the most worn boot is the Nike Vapor. Funnily enough, that boot costs £120 in the shops, whereas the Copa Mundial costs just £60. It's a retro boot that never lost favour, unlike those other boots

with a three-year shelf life, and has undergone very few changes in the past 30 years. If the best boot in the world doesn't need changing, then why do all the others?

It doesn't help having players who are willing to endorse anything so long as the price is right. You get footballers in adverts lying through their teeth to say that their boot is the best ever. And all the kids, including mine, believe them.

It was the same when I was a kid. Back in 1984 I worked my socks off cutting grass to save £34, an astronomical amount of money at the time, for a brand new pair of goalie gloves. I knew the ones I wanted, Uhlsports, the ones Dino Zoff wore. I remember looking through the black and white photographs in Shoot magazine and thinking: 'Wow they'd look absolutely fantastic in green!' I wore them to my next game and promptly ripped off one of the glove's fingers making a save. Great gloves they were. Nowadays, if I have a problem with my gloves I get the manufacturers to change them, but with boots it hasn't been so straightforward.

My own boot predicaments have, in the past, been farcical, although I admit I dug my own grave. I signed a boot contract thinking boots didn't matter that much for a goalie so long as they fitted. How wrong could I be? My boots gave me so much



trouble I had to dig out an old Umbro pair I had stashed in the attic (being a horder has its benefits) and wear those instead. The only problem then was I had to cover up the Umbro logos with stickers so as not to break my contract.

Chris Kamara caught me out when he went into the dressing room one day, picked up my boots with the stickers all over them and said: 'Can someone sponsor this lad please?' I had to search for a replacement boot. Thing is, I'd begun to enjoy getting the physio tape out and marking up the boots - it was making the most of my artistic talents.

The question is, are footballers becoming slaves - to use a Sepp Blatter term - to the manufacturers? Wearing the wrong boots, potentially hampering their performances, because the contract comes with a £1m price tag (before you ask, mine sadly does not). It seems a terrible state of affairs.