

Why it's time for the Premier League to back Lord Triesman and the England 2018 World Cup bid

Here's a confession: I like Lord Triesman. Here's another: I think he's doing a good job as chairman of England's bid to host the 2018 World Cup.

Until a few weeks ago, that would have been considered sacrilege. A bit like wearing an 'I Love Pol Pot' badge.

Or saying you still admire Tiger Woods.

Triesman's sin was worse than Tiger's, though. Way worse. Off the sinning scale.

I'm not talking about the Communist Party thing. Or being a Friend of Tony. Or supporting Spurs.

Oh no. Much worse. Because a little while ago Triesman did the unspeakable. He attacked the holy of holies: he criticised the Premier League.

Even worse, he criticised its figurehead, He Who Must Be Obeyed and Fawned Over, Richard Scudamore.

When every other sane football fan in England recognised Scudamore's plans for a 39th game as the work of a man who had taken leave of his senses, Triesman did not keep quiet.

He did the right thing as chairman of the FA and spoke out against the plans, too.

Then, he had the temerity to voice concerns that the levels of debt in English football were spiralling out of control.

Those, once more, were concerns shared by fans across the country, particularly at Manchester United and Liverpool.

They were also felt by UEFA president Michel Platini, perhaps the single most important person the FA has to convince in its battle to host the 2018 tournament.

In the past, chairmen of the FA were more likely to be chained outside Scudamore's office in a gimp suit than dare to say anything against him.

So the Premier League were most displeased by this show of subordination.

And that, basically, is all the explanation you need for why England's World Cup 2018 bid was constantly described as "troubled" until a few weeks ago.

It was because the Premier League, the most powerful football institution in England, simply could not get past its dislike of Triesman.

The most amusing manifestation of this came when that tinpot toy soldier from Yorkshire, Sir Dave Richards, took his toys home a few weeks



Capello

Triesman

ago.

Richards, who is Scudamore's trusted lieutenant and the Premier League chairman, announced he was resigning from the 2018 board to spend more time with his Brylcreem.

His move was widely interpreted as a ploy to force Triesman, who was reeling from criticism from several quarters, to resign.

It didn't quite work out like that, though. Because, actually, no-one gave a damn whether Richards quit or not.

By then, most people had come to recognise that beyond all the vicious personal attacks levelled at Triesman, he and 2018 chief executive Andy Anson had done more lobbying of FIFA executive committee members than all the other rival bid teams put together.

Anson, by the way, is gaining more and more respect for the thorough, open approach he has brought to the bid.

Together, he and Triesman, who was in Nigeria with former England striker Andrew Cole yesterday to talk to executive committee member Dr Amos Adamu, have built a proposal that is winning new friends and supporters every day.

Somehow, they have barged their way

through the mess of football politics and jealous ministers and former ministers and begun to make an impact.

"Everyone was sick of old men arguing," Anson said of the squabbling within the bid recently. He was absolutely right.

David Beckham did a magnificent job of reinvigorating the bid when he travelled to South Africa earlier this month and acted as the perfect antidote to the infighting that had derailed it.

He provided the stardust that Triesman and Anson cannot, but that should not be allowed to obscure the fact that they created the conditions for Beckham to make such a dramatic impact in Cape Town.

So when the host cities for England 2018 are announced today and the bid gets another filip, it should be time for the attacks on Triesman to stop.

And for some questions to be asked about Scudamore's role in all this.

Apparently, he banged the drum for our 2018 bid most assiduously on a recent trip to Asia.

Yet it would be strange if he had not known about Richards' intention to resign and still he

did not inform Triesman or Anson about them.

It would also be strange if he did not know that Premier League officials were, even last week, briefing against Triesman and criticising him with such vitriol that even journalists friendly to the league were taken aback by the tone of the attacks.

Of course, it's possible that Scudamore had not authorised the briefings and that his spin-doctors had gone rogue.

Despite the lasting embarrassment he caused with his miscalculation on the 39th game, Scudamore is bullet-proof at the Premier League because of the consistently brilliant job he has done negotiating a series of increasingly lucrative broadcasting contracts.

The danger for the Premier League chief executive, of course, is that Richards' resignation and the briefings against the FA chairman suggest his organisation is not wholly behind the 2018 bid.

So, surely, now is the time for Scudamore to express his public support for Triesman.

Otherwise, English football fans, who are desperate for the country to stage the World Cup in 2018, might get the wrong idea.

Chelsea midfielder Frank Lampard hits back at Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson's title 'mind games'

Frank Lampard has dismissed Sir Alex Ferguson's claims that Manchester United will be stronger after Christmas as 'mind games' as he fired a verbal warning back towards Old Trafford.

Chelsea's midfielder rejected the idea that the champions will crank up their push towards a fourth title in a row after his late penalty against Portsmouth ended a four-game winless streak.

It handed Carlo Ancelotti a three-point advantage over Ferguson

and Lampard was quick to point out that the tables have turned.

The England man insisted that the Scot's assertion did not bear close scrutiny last year and may not do so again, with the Blues welcoming back their influential Africa Cup of Nations players at the end of January.

Asked about Ferguson's prediction that his side will gain in strength as the season progresses, Lampard said: 'It's a mind game,' he said, 'it's as simple as that. If we're

within touching distance, then they might worry about us.

'They know we can put a run together.

'We had a really bad run around this time last year, but when Guus Hiddink came in we were in the best form by far of anyone in the league. We can do that again.' Lampard put his own misery following the miss at Manchester City behind him by lashing high into the roof of the net but Avram Grant's side, cur-

rently propping up the Premier League, took advantage through Frederic Piquionne as Chelsea's weakness at set-pieces was again highlighted.

Lampard dismissed the statistic which shows that 12 of their last 14 goals conceded have been from dead-ball situations.

'We're not pulling away from teams when we might do,' he said, 'and every free-kick and corner seems to drop to them. It's just a phase we're in.'



Lampard