

STUDENT VOICE

Corruption on the world's biggest pitch



by Luiz Macedo

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World Cup 2022, Germany vs. Japan. CREDIT: TASNIM NEWS AGENCY, CC BY 4.0 , VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

I spent a significant portion of my childhood in Brazil, a nation that breathes and lives futebol, and so of course that's where I first developed an appreciation for the game's beauty as well as a bitterness for its darker aspects.

Because there is so much money involved in futebol, corruption is pervasive in every aspect of the sport.

The World Cup, the biggest and most popular sporting event in the world, was held in Qatar because of bribes. It is a country that lacks the love for the game nor had the infrastructure for such an event but does have buckets of oil cash. Tom Blow's *Irish Mirror* article "'Absolute disgrace' -Jamie Carragher lets rip..." and Tariq Panja and Kevin Draper "U.S. Says FIFA Officials Were Bribed to Award World Cups to Russia and Qatar" New York Times article, discusses the extreme consequences of this decision.

The World Cup is the biggest event in futebol, and it has been held every four years since 1930. It brings people from all over the world together in one host country, where futebol and different cultures are celebrated. Sadly, this time around we saw the World Cup held in Qatar, a country that has never been recognized for its futebol. Its population and size are smaller than most U.S. states, so most of the world knew something fishy was happening when Qatar was chosen as the host for the World Cup in 2010. It's widely known that FIFA officials are very corrupt, but we never had proof. Now **we know for a fact** that those officials who voted for Qatar were bribed.

In the New York Times, Tariq Panja and Kevin Draper explained how the U.S. Department of Justice got involved in the FIFA Qatar corruption case. **In their article** they show a copy of an official DOJ document stating that "The U.S. prosecutors on Monday explicitly revealed details about money paid to five members of FIFA's top board ahead of the 2010 vote to choose Russia and Qatar as hosts.."

Most of these officials have now been removed from their roles, but it's too late.

Qatar is really small and didn't have the infrastructure for the amount of tourism that the World Cup attracts, causing this to be the most costly World Cup ever, with a cost of 220 billion. It cost more than the last ten World Cups combined!

Many of the stadiums used in the World Cup had to be built from scratch by migrant workers desperate for work. These workers endured the most appalling working conditions, as Tom Blow noted: "It's believed that at least 6,500 migrant workers have died since Qatar started building the infrastructure for the tournament, although the organizers have denied this."

Are we shocked that migrant laborers are subjected to this in a country with serious human rights issues? Imagine the worker's loved ones back at home not knowing if they are alive or not, since they don't even have the decency to acknowledge the

worker's deaths. I am an immigrant, so I am somewhat aware of how poorly these countries may treat us. But the treatment that these migrant workers in Qatar received was inhumane. The sad thing is that now that these stadiums have been used for a few World Cup games most of them will be destroyed because the cost of maintaining them is too high. All those lives lost for what? A few games.

This World Cup had a detrimental affect on the athletes. Since Qatar is mostly a desert, they had to move the World Cup to the winter, as the average temperature during the summer in Qatar is 90° F. The World Cup is typically played in the months of June and July, which is the best time for players because the regular futebol season is over in May, giving them time to rest and recover from injuries.

With this World Cup being played in the winter in the middle of a futebol season, it caused the season to be congested, with games almost every three days to make up for the games missed while the Qatar World Cup was taking place. Speaking from experience, playing every three days is a nightmare: your body doesn't have enough time to rest and heal, leading to you easily being injured. Tom Blow observed in his Irish Mirror article, "It gets moved to the situation where it is now in the middle of the season, and players who spend their whole lives dreaming of playing in the World Cup won't play."

Americans may not realize how deeply ingrained futebol is in some people's lives. But I remember when I was a child, the Ivory Coast qualified for their first World Cup in 2010. At the time, the nation was engaged in a deep civil war, but the national team players asked the country to cease fighting and come together as one, at least until the World Cup was over. And, would you believe it, the civil war was halted until the World Cup was over.

So when players grow up dreaming and working hard every day until they are pros, only to have their dreams cut short by a minor injury, it's truly sad. The World Cup is supposed to represent the pinnacle of a nation's display of futebol strength, but how can that happen when so many superstars are left at home cheering for their side rather than supporting them? Players only had a week off after the World Cup before club futebol resumed. That's only a week break after a grueling tournament; people sometimes forget that athletes are still humans and aren't machines that could play every week of the year.

With all this being said, this World Cup was truly one of the most exciting and memorable tournaments in recent memory, with many unexpected results and inspiring performances from underdogs and established powers alike. It was a joy to watch Morocco make history as the first African nation to reach the semi-finals, and to see South Korea and Japan have fairytale runs that captured the hearts of fans around the world. I even got see my hero and idol truly carry his country on his back crowning Argentina winner over France with one the most intense finals to date.

In the end futebol won. But it is impossible to ignore the greed and corruption of FIFA officials and the questionable decision to host the event in Qatar. While some may argue that “politics don’t belong in futebol” or that “it was important to bring the World Cup to the Middle East for the first time,” the fact remains that the horrific treatment of migrant workers in Qatar and the impact on players who had to compete in the middle of their club seasons cannot be justified.

The World Cup should be a celebration of the beautiful game and a way to exchange culture, a way to bring people together, not a platform for corruption and greed. The World Cup needs to be staged in a country that respects the players’ well-being and preparation, properly celebrates and appreciates futebol’s rich history and culture, but also that can handle the influx of tourists. Australia, Argentina and Moroco are all worthy contenders to host this illustrious occasion and carry on showcasing the elegance and diversity of futebol on a global scale.

With the U.S being a joint host of the 2026 World Cup, I hope we are able to make the most of it, as futebol is slowly but surely growing in our nation.

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