

# Whatever it takes



Selten so gelacht: Kataris Emir Tamim Bin-Hamad Al-Thani, WM-Gastgeber 2022, FIFA-Boss Gianni Infantino und Russlands Präsident Wladimir Putin, WM-Gastgeber 2018, bei der symbolischen Übergabe des WM-Balls im Juli 2018 in Moskau (FOTO: PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA)

**Bonita Mersiades war Marketingchefin der australischen WM-Bewerbung 2022, verlor ihren Job auf hinterlistiges Betreiben externer Berater, riskierte als Whistleblower viel und wurde von der FIFA-Ethikkommission um den vermeintlichen Chefermittler Michael Garcia und Richter Hans-Joachim Eckert denunziert. Ihr Buch „Whatever It Takes“ ist ein beeindruckender, kluger und präziser Report - auch über den Umgang des Sports mit Hinweisgebern. Ein Auszug.**

BY BONITA MERSIADES, SYDNEY

**S**YDNEY, MAY 2013: Another surprise in my inbox. An email from FIFA's chief ethics investigator Michael Garcia. He wrote that „I understand you have been trying to get in touch with me.“ He invited me to share my concerns with him.

I was curious. Why did he suggest I had been trying to contact him, when I hadn't? How did he get my email?

The fact is, I had barely given the Garcia inquiry a thought. I saw it as an exercise where the only outcome would be the one FIFA wanted.

The Garcia inquiry was established to find a rationale for taking the World Cup from Qatar and giving it to the „second place“ getter, the USA. If Garcia could find a smoking gun against Qatar, then FIFA would be well placed to

move the 2022 World Cup which is what Blatter preferred. Australia's bid - and anything I had to say about it or FIFA - would be incidental. So why would he want to talk to me?

Michael Garcia also had no ability to compel people to talk with him, no capacity to trace financial transactions, no penalty to hand-out for those who didn't cooperate with him or who didn't tell the truth, and he was banned from visiting Russia. In other words, there was no reason to have much confidence in the work he was doing.

But having been contacted by him, thinking about it, and talking it over at home and with close colleagues, I decided to respond. My reasoning was that the only way Garcia, a former US Attorney-General with the Southern District of New York, had a hope of doing his job properly was by people who had

some knowledge or experience about the World Cup bids cooperating with him. And the only way world football would ever change is by getting the issues out into the open.

Not long afterwards, we had our first telephone hook-up. Me in Sydney; Garcia, at least one of his law firm associates, and one of Louis Freeh's right hand men, Tim Flynn, in New York.

Flynn was a former 23-year veteran of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) now working as one of the managing directors of Freeh's consulting firm registered in Delaware. The Freeh Group, founded by former FBI director Louis Freeh, was working for FIFA more or less full time on security and investigatory issues.

The first discussion was mostly concerned with process. I let them know I was bound by a confidentiality agree-

ment. „We'll fix that," said Garcia. „FFA has to let you talk with us. FIFA has made that clear to all bidders."

It was a flawed concept from the outset. By the very fact that they needed a release from my confidentiality agreement, FFA would know I was talking to them when those who met with Garcia were supposed to remain confidential.

Many weeks afterwards, when Garcia obtained a release from the FFA, he told me they had been the „most difficult" of all of the bidders. „It got quite tense. I really had to put my foot down and call in FIFA over it," he said.

Great, I thought. So FIFA knew also.

„It only made me think they've got something to hide," he continued. „Why would they go to such great lengths to try to stop you talking with us?" He may have received a slowly-extracted and grudging signature from the Football Federation Australia (FFA) for me to speak with Garcia, but I knew there would be some form of retaliation. It would either be from FFA, the bid consultants, FIFA or all of the above. I expressed my concern about it.

„You don't need to worry about that. What you say to us is protected. It's confidential. It's anonymous. We'll do all that we can to protect you," Garcia said.

**A**ARHUS, OCTOBER 2013: I was in Aarhus, to attend the [Play the Game](#) conference of journalists, sports academics and sports associations who were interested in corruption in sport.

Even though it was almost three years after the vote for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups, the principal topic remained FIFA, those World Cup votes and the Garcia investigation.

Professor Mark Pieth, head of FIFA's Governance Committee, was a keynote speaker, as was FIFA's head of communications Walter de Gregorio. I spoke briefly with both of them.

The first thing De Gregorio asked was when my book would be published.

„Is it all about Peter Hargitay?" he asked.

„No, he's a bit player in the end," I said. „But don't worry, Walter, it's mostly a comedy."

While I was at the conference, another email arrived from Garcia's assistant.

After Garcia eventually received the release from FFA, I had other, lengthy

phone discussions with him, Flynn and their team.

From the outset, I said I didn't have so-called „smoking gun" evidence, other than the report of the CONCACAF Committee of Integrity about the USD\$462,200 pocketed by president Jack Warner, president of CONCACAF and vice president of FIFA. What I could help them with is observations, what we were doing, how the consultants worked, and how I saw that fitting in with how FIFA operated. They asked for any documentation. I explained that, because of the way I departed the role, I didn't have much.

The email informed me that they were making arrangements for me to travel to New York to see Garcia in two weeks time.

The first question I was asked by many journalists as they greeted me at the conference, unsurprisingly, was whether Garcia was in touch with me. I informed them I was travelling to New York to see him soon.

**N**EW YORK, NOVEMBER 2013: After snow on the ground on the day I arrived in New York, the next morning was fine, sunny and cold. Even colder than Aarhus.

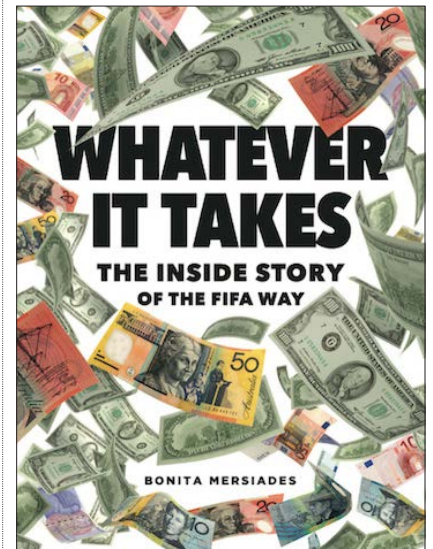
I walked the five blocks north on Lexington Avenue to Garcia's midtown Manhattan law firm, colder than I had felt for some years.

Garcia's 500-person New York office was located on the top floors of a 59-storey tower with friendly security staff on the ground floor. The express lift whisked me to the top which opened into a spacious reception area that took up almost one half of the building. Before me was a spectacular view of Manhattan looking north past Central Park and east to Roosevelt Island. Groups of leather sofas were placed around the floor with a large reception desk strategically placed to observe all comings and goings.

I felt like I had walked on to the set of an American legal drama TV show.

One of the associates who sat in on our telephone conversations and organised my travel, greeted me and led me down a corridor to a meeting room.

It was easy to recognise Tim Flynn, the former FBI man. He rose immediately as I entered the room. He held out his hand. I judged him to be early-to-mid-50s, trim, fit-looking, average



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height, with a short haircut, in a stance as if he was ready to pounce at any sign of trouble.

There were ten chairs around a comfortably-sized meeting room table. Recording equipment was already set up. There were several folders of material and some loose pieces of paper on the table in front of the two associates, and one folder in front of Flynn and an unoccupied seat at the end of the table. A cupboard under the window that faced west across the Manhattan skyline, offered coffee, tea, water and cookies.

I helped myself to a coffee, and made small talk about the weather and my flight.

Garcia arrived a few minutes later. He was short, much shorter than he looked in the photos. Perhaps my height. He held out his hand. The other one was holding a Blackberry.

„Call me Mike," he said.

THE FIRST THING Garcia said - before the recording started - was to inform me that the proceedings were confidential, as he also told me over the phone previously. My identity would be protected, he told me - notwithstanding both FIFA and FFA knew I was talking with him - and what we talked about would remain confidential.

„I know you know a lot of media. You are not to tell them you're here, that we're talking or what we're talking



about. And especially Andrew Jennings. He's not to know anything about any of this. Andrew Jennings must not know."

He emphasised the last sentence.

A specific mention of Andrew Jennings? Twice? Now who at FIFA could possibly have briefed him about Jennings? And why wouldn't Jennings be someone Garcia would want to talk to?

After all, he unveiled the ISL scandal years before - and was one hundred per cent correct. Wouldn't Andrew Jennings be a useful person to speak with for this inquiry?

I said to Garcia that it may be a bit late for that. I explained that I had already informed some journalists, including Andrew Jennings, that I would be meeting with him a few weeks beforehand in Denmark.

I also thought, but didn't say, that I was under no obligation to him or to FIFA not to say anything to anyone if I wanted to. He shrugged his shoulders. „Well don't tell them anymore," he said. I thought no more of that exchange. The recording equipment was turned on. I asked him what would happen to his report, noting that his Ethics Committee investigation into the ISL matter - separate from the legal findings of the Zug Court - was not published.

He gave the predictable answer, the comfortable one for him. It was all up to his colleague head of the adjudicatory chamber, Judge Eckert.

„What will happen from there, it will really be up to Judge Eckert. Where it goes from there, I really couldn't tell you."

That may be so, but I couldn't help but think that it was a cop out for a man who once told the New York Times that his credo was to do „the right things for the right reasons".

By this stage, he had already been working on his World Cup bid investigation for 15 months. It would be another ten months before he submitted his report. And yet he couldn't say, and didn't seem that fussed about, what would happen. Was he merely a hired gun?

He homed-in very quickly on the cost of the Australian bid. He wanted to know how much I knew about the „level of expense detail".

I explained that what I could talk about was how the budget shifted, and



*Galten als Top-Juristen, verwirren mit merkwürdigen Resultaten: FIFA-Ethiker Michael Garcia, Hans-Joachim Eckert nach ihrer Verpflichtung 2012 durch Joseph Blatter. (Foto: FIFA)*

could point out the inconsistencies between the various budgets and the report by FFA on final expenditure.

„The first budget that PwC put together was around \$90 million." His jaw dropped when he heard that amount. „Exactly, I had that reaction when I heard it too."

**„Andrew Jennings must not know."**

Michael Garcia

I explained that we eventually asked the government for two amounts of money: \$54.3 million for the main grant - the government gave us \$45.6 million - and \$28.5 million for the second grant for unspecified development projects.

I told him I used to manage budgets in previous government roles of up to \$8 billion, including preparing budget papers and funding submissions for Cabinet. I understood budgeting and financial management. I knew how go-

vernment budgeting worked. But I said that I did not understand some strange differences between the internal budget for the bid, and other documents I had seen, specifically FFA's final report to government that was tabled in the Australian Parliament.

A copy of the spreadsheet setting out the internal bid budget was distributed around the table - the one we were never to take out of the office of Ben Buckley, who was the CEO of Football Federation Australia until August 2012.

Garcia focussed on the amounts for „international football development", \$4 million for Africa, \$2.5 million for Asia; the almost equivalent amount of bonuses for the consultants, \$4 million for Fedor Radmann, \$2.5 million for Peter Hargitay; and the amount budgeted for the Bid Book.

I said again that he needed to look at the spreadsheet in conjunction with the final report on expenditure to government, as well as some other documents.

There were [lots of questions](#) about our consultants. Who were they close to on the Executive Committee? What favours did they seek? What were their

roles exactly? Why didn't we announce the appointments of Peter Hargitay and Fedor Radmann?

Garcia was totally aghast when I pointed out that Radmann was paid more than \$150,000 a month, via his companion Andreas Abold.

I said that Hargitay told me „never to put Radmann's name on an email because to do so would jeopardise everything“.

I told him that I read this particular email as I walked through the front door at home one evening quite late, and the brief conversation my husband and I had about it.

### „Please do not list Fedor“

Hargitay had copied the email to Mohamed Bin Hammam's personal assistant, Jenny Be. I thought perhaps he made a mistake. But there was no mistaking what he wrote.

*!!!!!!! Dear Bonita*

*Many thanks for this*

*Will revert with input*

*Please do not list Fedor in the recipient lines!!!! You simply MUST NOT do that. Why? Because you are thus jeopardizing everything.*

I had asked my husband how he interpreted it.

„One of two options: Fedor is up to no good; or Hargitay's a drama queen. Ask Ben what he thinks. If he doesn't have an answer then you've got your answer,“ he told me.

I told Garcia that I did ask Ben about it. „He just basically said to forget anything Hargitay says and ignore it ... it was further evidence that Radmann was up to something in my view ... I raised the question so many times. Not once did these people with whom I worked closely, Ben being one, (FFA chairman) Frank Lowy being another, say ‚There's nothing going on here‘. They never did.“

He said that he was particularly interested in the German connection with our bid, and who came first. Franz Beckenbauer, Fedor Radmann or Andreas Abold? Who else from the German FA (Deutscher Fußballbund/DFB) was involved? I told him about the 2007 cooperation agreement with Germany. „The same people were involved in 2006 and 2010,“ he said.

He then stopped the recording. „I'm actually looking at your bid in the con-

ext of those two other tournaments, going back to 1998 or 1999 when the Germany World Cup was awarded.“

We talked further before the recording was turned on again.

Once it was, he was surprised to learn that the \$4 million for the Oceania Confederation was an additional amount from government via the aid agency.

„This is a separate pot of money that you're tapping into, other than your 46 million,“ he asked. I confirmed it.

„Was there ever any discussion about Lowy financing any of this?“ he asked. I told him I raised it.

He wanted to know when Reynald Temarii, then member of FIFA's Executive Committee, told us he would vote for us. His eyebrows raised when I said at least as early as March 2008, officially June 2008.

We talked of the \$5 million Australia promised for AFC's Vision Asia and how we got to it starting with the meeting between Bin Hammam and Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on the sidelines of the May 2008 FIFA Congress in Sydney. Garcia wondered where the money was paid from. I told him it was a mystery as only one-quarter of it was accounted for in FFA's final report to government, yet we won an award from the Asian Football Confederation in November 2010 for the \$5 million gift.

### „Incidental“ in value

I also pointed out that the \$4 million budgeted for Africa was referred to by Amadou Diakite, a football official from Mali, in his discussion with the fake consultants from the 2010 *Sunday Times* sting. Diakite was a member of the FIFA Executive Committee that awarded the 2006 World Cup to Germany. Radmann knew him well.

The transcript of part of Diakite's discussion with the fake consultants was on the website of the *Court of Arbitration for Sport* (CAS). I said I did not know if the money was paid, but Diakite clearly refers to it - just as he did to offers from other bidding nations also. Curiously, The *Sunday Times* and other media outlets at the time only reported him talking about an offer from Qatar. Garcia asked me to send through the link to the transcript. Later, after I did so, an email came back asking whether I could also supply an English

translation of it. I was taken aback by that request from a well-resourced committee.

We talked about how Australia distributed money to confederations and Jack Warner, compared with how Qatar might have done so.

I told him the vehicles Qatar might have used - based on nothing more than observation - included the Qatar Foundation, the Qatar Investment Authority of which CEO Hassan Al-Thawadi was a Board member, or the Aspire Academy. Andreas Bleicher, director of the Aspire Academy, travelled regularly with the Qatar bid team. Aspire also later became a sponsor of various activities associated with Hargitay.

Like almost everyone else when talking about the Australian bid, the talk returned to the pearl pendants, the ones that were given to the partners of ExCo members at Lowy's mansion in May 2008, before the bidding process formally commenced. He asked me about the pearl gift for Maureen Warner, clarifying that this was the only one given during the bidding process.

I told him I felt uncomfortable with having to purchase it while we were bidding, as the gift was inconsistent with bid guidelines that dictated gifts should be „incidental“ in value. I recalled that I wrote an email to Lowy and Ben about it at the time.

We all laughed at the thought that what was „incidental“ to a billionaire such as Lowy, and certain members of FIFA's Executive Committee, would be different from what we might consider incidental. He wanted to know whether the \$2,000 pendant was paid for by bid monies, and I told him I didn't know this level of detail.

I said that there was much more done to curry favour with Warner at Hargitay's constant urging.

I mentioned that we had also funded the under-20 T&T team to take part in a training camp in Cyprus. One of our junior women's teams played a game against Trinidad's junior women's team. I said I wasn't certain but the travel for these trips may have been organised via Jack Warner's travel company. We signed a cooperation agreement with the Jamaican FA, headed by Warner's good friend, the late Horace Burrell. Prime Minister Rudd had a one-on-one meeting with Warner in Port of Spain. And, of course, there was the

USD\$462,200 donation to help upgrade Jack Warner's stadium.

I mentioned Russia and the many overtures we made towards them through political circles as well as via the consultants and their links. I said that Lowy invited Vitaly Mutko to join him on his super yacht in the Mediterranean in the northern hemisphere summer of 2009, but I did not know if the meeting happened. We talked of the friendly matches organised by all bidders. He wanted to know how a friendly would be helpful to ExCo members.

I explained that it would be one or all of the match fee, who picked-up the expenses, what was included in the expenses, and the broadcast rights. Even at a younger age group, such as the matches against Trinidad and Tobago, match fees and paying expenses could be helpful. We discussed how these were paid. I suggested he look at friendly matches beyond the date of the bid vote, as some were still happening in 2011 and perhaps even into 2012.

Unrelated to bidding, I shared a story with them from 12 years previously when Australia played Colombia in a friendly match when I was the operations manager of the men's national team, the Socceroos. The comparatively modest match fee of USD\$40,000 was paid in cash. „It turned-up literally in a brown paper bag in cash from a man with a ponytail wearing a white lace shirt,“ I told them. They laughed.

Garcia asked me what changes did I think should be made to the bidding process. I identified six - besides fundamental changes to FIFA itself.

Opening up the vote to the entire Congress. Having a non-refundable fee to be a bidder that can help form part of a development budget once the bid is decided. Limiting bid budgets to the extent that was possible - in other words a type of „financial fair play“ for bidders. No legacy requirement as part of the conduct of the bid, but only as a result of staging a World Cup, once awarded. Making sure every one in a bid team, including consultants, were aware of, and subject to, the bidding rules and regulations. And never have more than one tournament open at a time. I also reiterated what I said to him in an earlier telephone conversation that I thought none of this was possible because FIFA wasn't interested in, or it did not suit them to, reform.

„They are incapable of reforming themselves,“ I said. „Their culture, their way of doing business runs deep.“

„As a country, using taxpayers money, we ran a reputational risk with our conduct because we employed Hargitay and Fedor Radmann,“ I told him.

The great shame for Australia was that our bid had a strong argument on merit, but FIFA simply isn't interested in merit-based arguments. It was about what went on behind closed doors.

Garcia thanked me for taking the trip to see him. „It's been incredibly helpful for us,“ he said, as I rose and shook the hands of Flynn and Garcia's two associates. „We're an open door. If you do think of anything, please contact us, and we'll do the same if we see something we didn't ask or you might have some insight on.“



*Im Windschatten: Berater und Lobbyist Peter Hargitay, Klient Joseph Blatter, 2003 am Rande des FIFA-Kongresses in Doha. (FOTO: JENS WEINREICH)*

He said they would be in Australia soon and we would meet again then.

Garcia walked me out into the corridor and to the large reception room, where we chatted for a few minutes. He told me that he had three children, and he lived in the outer suburban reaches of New York City to the north of the scene laid out before us. He confided that his wife preferred living in Washington DC, as the housing was better and everything was closer. I took some photos of the splendid view from midtown to Central Park and beyond.

I put on my coat to venture out into the cold. I realised I was exhausted. A combination of jet lag and concentrating for more than six hours on events and conversations that were now up to six years old. We shook hands. He gripped my forearm with his left hand, politician style. „Thanks, Bonita. Thank you again.“

**S**YDNEY, April 2014: I did not give the Garcia inquiry much thought after my trip, though I followed the regular media articles about his investigation. Some seemed well-informed; others were speculative.

His team were now visiting Sydney as part of their world tour. They asked to see me again. I took the ferry into the city and walked the few hundred metres up the hill to the five-star hotel where they were spending the week. This time it was Garcia, Flynn and yet another associate from Garcia's law firm.

Tim Flynn greeted me and took me to the meeting room. It was small, closed-in with no windows and no fresh air. It smelt slightly stale. Even though there was just three of them, the room looked crowded with multiple folders open before them.

„Let's get one thing out of the way first, Bonita,“ said Garcia, before I had a chance to settle myself. „I told you not to talk with media.“

He was referring to a report run by journalist Nick Harris in the UK's *Mail on Sunday* newspaper which focussed [on the payment to Jack Warner](#) and the money for Oceania and Africa, as well as the fact that Garcia himself was „ruffling feathers“ of the FIFA Executive Committee in Zurich. Garcia had been in Zurich a few weeks before, prior to an ExCo meeting, to interview each member of the committee who had voted in 2010. The ExCo members concerned were so incensed that they attempted to stop his investigation.

Harris' story certainly referred to information he heard from me, but I was not his only source.

„And as I told you in November, Mike, Nick Harris has known that I met with you since last October. He sat on that information for almost six months, as did others,“ I said.

„Who told him we were coming here?“ Mike asked.

„He already knew, but I confirmed it when he asked me.“

I also said that, to be fair to Harris, I thought he and some other journalists believe their reporting is doing the investigation a favour.

The view around media circles after Garcia's recent Zurich visit was that, despite the on-the-record comments from FIFA president Joseph Blatter supporting the Garcia investigation, it was actually Blatter, his people and



those close to him on the ExCo who wanted to stop the investigation.

„The general view is that, to the extent there are any „good guys“ on the Executive Committee, they will be more emboldened if they realise that you're making progress. This may not be a correct assessment, but it's not an illogical one,“ I said.

He didn't say anything.

„Besides, I've been getting calls from German journalists for months. Guys I haven't even heard of before. They seem to be very well briefed and asking very relevant questions.“

One of the German journalists specifically told me that he was briefed by Garcia more than once.

I held Garcia's gaze.

„Well, you shouldn't have talked to Nick Harris,“ he said haughtily, ignoring the comments about the German journalists. He shifted in his seat, shuffled some papers.

THE ADMONISHMENT MAY have been over, but Garcia's demeanour was different. He seemed tired. Lacking in energy. Uninterested. He was going through the motions. It was as if he put up barricades in his own mind about any further inquiries.

As well as his recent experience in Zurich, where the attempt was made to cut short his inquiry, I wondered whether the change in Garcia had anything to do with a noticeable shift in Sepp Blatter's rhetoric too.

Initially, Blatter was hopeful that the Garcia inquiry would come up with a „smoking gun“ on Qatar so the World Cup 2022 could be hosted by the USA. The material from the Asian Football Confederation, Frank Lowy's private investigations and former Qatar 2022 bid committee member Phaedra Almajid were paramount to that happening.

From 2012 when the Garcia inquiry was announced, and throughout most of 2013, Blatter was relatively critical of Qatar. Sepp Blatter clearly sent a message during this period that Qatar 2022 was not a guaranteed event.

He made pronouncements that holding the World Cup in Qatar „may have been a mistake“ and it was „not rational“ to hold it there. Qatar could read the tea leaves as much as anyone. Blatter was invited to visit the new, young Emir Tamim Bin-Hamad Al-Thani in November 2013, where the Emir reminded him of the arrangement with

the retired Emir Hamad struck after the vote in 2010: that, in return for Bin Hamam being out of the Presidential race and maintaining his silence, Qatar would keep the World Cup.

Come what may.

It was also a view Blatter was hearing from his CEO Jerome Valcke who was satisfied that Qatar 2022 was viable commercially with the help of the *Al Jazeera* bonus. Valcke also knew that, from a legal perspective, FIFA could be ruined if they tried to change the decision made in December 2010.

After the visit to the new Emir, the FIFA president started to shift his position to say it was „much too soon“ to say what would happen.

A few weeks later, after years of resisting a change to the timing of the World Cup, Blatter said for the first time that the tournament would need

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Bonita Mersiades

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to be held at a different time of year because of the „mistake“ of ignoring the technical assessment regarding the oppressive and excessive heat in Qatar in June. Others such as Michel Platini and Theo Zwanziger, had been saying the same thing for years - although each for different reasons. A few weeks later, Blatter claimed that those who criticised Qatar's win were „racist“.

It was also something I first said in 2011 - although the rest of my sentence was „... without other bidders first examining their own behaviour“.

Garcia was an expert, but he was also a paid consultant with limited scope to do the proper job of an investigator. Was he given another set of instructions in Zurich? Had he been told what the outcome should be?

Flynn showed me my email to Frank Lowy and Ben Buckley written in July 2009 after I purchased Maureen Warner's pearl pendant in Dubai. The one I told them I wrote.

„Why did you send that?“ Flynn asked. „For precisely the reasons I say so. We were in bidding mode and a gift

that expensive was, in my view, outside bidding guidelines. I felt uncomfortable about it.“

„What happened when you sent that email?“

A pretty stupid question considering the response was in front of them.

„Ben said ‚Never to write an email like that again‘.“

„Why did he say that?“ they asked.

„Because he didn't want in writing a suggestion that I was concerned about us breaching the bidding guidelines.“

„Could it be that he didn't want you writing to Frank Lowy?“

I sat back in my seat and looked at them. Obviously this was how FFA and/or Ben rebutted it to them. I laughed out loud. It clearly didn't say that.

„Not writing to Lowy“, and „not writing an email like that“ were two different things. „No. I had free rein to write directly to Lowy on anything as long as I copied Ben, which I always did. In fact, that was his general rule and part of the problem in the organisation; he wanted to be copied on everything.“

Flynn asked if there were any other documents I could give them.

Why did they keep asking that? I explained once again that I had very few documents because of the nature of my departure, but they were welcome to have what I did have. I added: „If I still had the same computer, you could have it,“ I said. „But I gave that back. They probably still have it if you want to check it.“

They asked to see my personal notebooks. „No problem,“ I said. „Just as long as you're not expecting diary entries. I'm not a spy who makes detailed records. I take notes as an aide-memoire for myself.“

I looked down at my note pad. „Just like I have here,“ I added, showing them my contemporaneous notes of our meeting. „That would be really helpful,“ Garcia said.

The three of them each had a copy of FFA's internal bid budget spreadsheet in front of them. „Have you thought any more about that spreadsheet?“ Garcia asked. I shook my head.

Garcia leaned forward in his chair. The sleeves of his white shirt were rolled-up about three-quarters of the way. His elbows were on the meeting table. Other than his little tantrum over Nick Harris' article, it was the first time he seemed engaged in the meeting.



Joseph Blatter im November 2013 beim Jung-Emir Tamim. (FOTO: AMIRI DIWAN STATE OF QATAR)

„We just met with your former colleague,“ he said. „He said these two different budgets might be unusual but not improper.“

He was referring to the former chief financial officer, and the fact that the budget provided to the Government for reporting six-monthly progress was so different from the one that was being used for internal management reporting purposes.

It was a mystery why Garcia was so keen to meet with him. What I actually said in New York was that the former chief financial officer had no oversight of the bid budget; that another, more junior member of Stuart Taggart's operations team was responsible for bid finances. Garcia had asked me who that was, and I spelled out the staff member's name. The fact that the chief financial officer had no insight into the bid budget was a matter of tension and contention between him and Ben: that was the point I had made.

Yet, in November when we were in New York, Garcia had persisted for some reason.

„He leaves at some point, too?“ the transcript shows Mike asked me the previous November.

„Yes, he leaves in September 2009.“

„And why does he leave?“

„I think Ben got rid of him because he ... they just didn't get on. They were chalk and cheese. He was a typical ac-

countant, very careful, very cautious. I think it became uncomfortable for Ben when the CFO ... was concerned that he didn't have any insight into the bid budget.“

„Do you speak with him at all?“

„Maybe once or twice a year, to wish him a Merry Christmas or something, yes.“

„Do you think he'd speak with us?“

„I can ask him if you like.“

„Give us his contact (sic) and I'll reach out for him and see if he would be willing to speak with us.“

One of Garcia's associates chased me twice for the former chief financial officer's details after I returned to Sydney. I thought now about what Garcia just said. Almost anyone could have told them that two budgets were not necessarily improper, but he was asking the wrong question of the wrong person. I said nothing.

Garcia continued. „We've looked at it. We've thought about it. We looked at the other documents. And we think the answer to your bid is in that spreadsheet,“ he said.

There was more silence in the room.

„I just wondered whether you had any more thoughts about it at all,“ he added. I shook my head. „No, I haven't given it a thought.“

More silence.

„Do you think Beckenbauer, Radmann and Abold were part of a package

deal?“ He asked a similar question in November. „I have thought about that more since the last time you asked me,“ I said. „It could be cut and spliced any way, but the more I think about it, I believe it was Beckenbauer as early as 2007, followed by Radmann and Abold together. I have no doubt they were part of a package deal.“

Garcia looked at Flynn. They both made a note.

DESPITE GARCIA SAYING he thought the answer to our bid was in the spreadsheet, I still did not intend giving it another thought. I was both perplexed and annoyed that he persisted on meeting with the former chief financial officer who was not a member of the bid team, and had zero insight into our World Cup bid.

Having spoken with Garcia four times, met him twice, shared my personal notes with him, I thought I fulfilled my duty to his inquiry and, more broadly, to football.

SYDNEY, JUNE 2014: The headlines were big and bold from *The Sunday Times*: „Plot to Buy the World Cup - huge email cache reveals secrets of Qatar's shock victory.“

Weeks before the 2014 World Cup in Brazil was to start, Jonathan Calvert and Heidi Blake told the world they had access to a secret cache of documents from a FIFA whistleblower that lifted the lid on how Qatar won the 2022 World Cup.

Except it wasn't. If you read beyond the headlines of the multiple stories they wrote each week over the next four weeks, it didn't show files that revealed „How the former head of football in Qatar bought crucial votes to secure the 2022 World Cup.“

What it detailed was a comprehensive list of payments made by Mohamed Bin Hammam to almost any world football official who asked for it.

With a few exotic non-Anglo Saxon names to add to the headlines, such as Seedy Kinteh of Gambia who asked for and received money from Bin Hammam, very few bothered to look at what was really going on. By Calvert's and Blake's account, Bin Hammam gave money to at least 30 officials in African football. They said this was to buy the World Cup for Qatar.

Yet not one of those officials had a vote for 2018 or 2022.

Only one person had a vote amongst the many other people to whom Bin Hammam provided hospitality or gave money - Jack Warner. But the series of payments made to him were six months after the vote and associated with the trip Bin Hammam made to the Caribbean as part of his FIFA presidential campaign.

Bin Hammam also made payments to former ExCo member Reynald Temarii, who didn't vote because he was suspended. Bin Hammam met the expenses for the appeal against Temarii's ban - the action which meant Oceania confederation did not have a voter.

While this took away a certain vote for Australia for 2022, and probably for England in 2018, the payment wasn't part of a pre-meditated, planned campaign by Bin Hammam but a reaction to - for him - fortuitous circumstances.

In the second week of their serialised reports, Calvert and Blake recounted the [visit of Franz Beckenbauer](#) and Fedor Radmann to Doha in October 2009 as an initiative of Bin Hammam. It wasn't. Worse, they sought no comment from the Australian bid, which employed Radmann.

That was when I contacted Calvert.

The Australian bid asked Beckenbauer and Radmann to visit Doha in October 2009. Calvert didn't want to know. His lack of interest is what made it clear to me that, regardless of who held the material, the benefactor behind Calvert's and Blake's access to it had to be Frank Lowy. There was no other reason for the story of Beckenbauer's and Radmann's visit to Doha to be so wrong, and for a journalist of Calvert's experience and high standing not to care. And this was when I realised there was a compelling back story to be investigated and told.

**SYDNEY, NOVEMBER 2014:** „How Chuck Blazer became a confidential informant for the FBI!“ screamed the headline. It was the front page lead story in the *New York Daily News* outli-

ning how Blazer was detained on his motorised scooter by the FBI and the IRS on Fifth Avenue, New York, three years before in November 2011 - just as Andrew Jennings' report in August of the same year pointed to. (See „*Pirates of the Caribbean*“ by Ken Bensinger)

Chuck Blazer, an American, was the long time CEO of the CONCACAF confederation and FIFA Executive Committee member, who worked closely with Jack Warner for decades. Along with Warner, he was implicated in the report of the Committee of Integrity into CONCACAF finances in 2013.

Since his arrest, Blazer had been assisting the FBI by recording conversations with other world football officials and spilling the beans on decades of dishonesty. The persons of interest whom the FBI asked him to secretly record included Russian Executive Committee member Vitaly Mutko, Russia 2018 CEO Alexey Sorokin, FFA chairman Frank Lowy and Peter Hargitay.

The report revealed that the FBI was involved in other investigations from „the Caribbean to Zurich, from Australia to Moscow to Qatar“.

Blazer was the first person arrested with intimate knowledge of FIFA, and the third person arrested with deep knowledge of CONCACAF. The other two were Jack Warner's sons, Daryan and Daryll, who had also been under house detention in Miami since 2011.

Just like Al Capone, the authorities pinged Blazer initially on unpaid taxes.

With the help of people such as Andrew Jennings, and former MI6 officer Christopher Steele who had been on the trail since 2009, they had enough information on Blazer from his life in world football to throw the book at him.

**PERTH, NOVEMBER 2014:** I was in Perth, Western Australia, on a work assignment when a friend in the UK sent me a text message. „You need to look at the Eckert Report. Urgent.“

Judge Hans-Joachim Eckert, chairman of the adjudicatory chamber of the

FIFA Ethics Committee published his [summary](#) of the Garcia report that was submitted in September 2014. It wasn't the „full Garcia“ but a 42-page summary of a report that was thought to be ten times longer than that, excluding the attachments.

I turned on the computer, and read this about me:

„*The relevant individual undermined its own credibility by talking to the media.*“

After reading the entire summary, including critical remarks about Phaedra Almajid also, talking it over with a handful of people, thinking about it,



*Sunday Times, Juni 2014.*

and getting through the shock, the anger and the hurt - I was delighted.

Here was a supposedly reputable German Judge putting his name to a summary report of Garcia's 25-month investigation which was clearly deficient. The investigation didn't speak to Spain or Portugal.

The Russians told Garcia's deputy, the Swiss prosecutor Cornel Borbély, and Garcia's offsideer Tim Flynn, that they leased their computers, which had since been thrown out.

Because of this, the Russians said they couldn't really help as they didn't know how to access the data.

Borbely and Flynn accepted this. Here was a country that could launch a dog in space as far back as 1957, but apparently couldn't back-up the data on their computers.

Garcia himself did not get involved in the inquiry into Russia because he was banned by Vladimir Putin from

Your strategic „savoir faire“ and, more so, the tactical savvy that won your country the World Cup bid is spectacular. There can only be admiration for the way you handled the mine-field of changing loyalties. But your modus operandi, based on years of experience, combined with intimate knowledge of the players on the chess set of group dynamics, and your ability to offer what others could not, was a fine lesson in Machiavellian expertise, combined with cultural history – both of which combined, generated the results you wanted to achieve. Accept my respectful congratulations for that.

„Lektion in machiavellischem Geschick“: Hargitay preist Bin Hammam in einer Email kurz nach dem WM-Sieg Qatars. (QUELLE: SUNDAY TIMES)



entering the Russian Federation in April 2013. Garcia was one of 18 Americans banned by Russia related to the United States' Magnitsky Act.

Eckert's summary report indicated that Garcia identified „problematic“ conduct from Australia as well as other bidders. The two winning bidders of Russia and Qatar had absolutely nothing to answer.

What stood out like a sore thumb was that the summary singled-out two women - Phaedra Almajid and me - from more than 70 witnesses, and all but identified and discredited us. In fact, while everyone else was a „witness“ we were referred to as „whistleblowers“ and „it“. It was disgraceful treatment, but also typical of how large organisations and institutions treat people who do dare to raise questions.

I also realised that if the summary report was this brutal, the „full Garcia“ - if ever it came out - would be worse.

Despite all the assurances - by telephone, in writing, in person and, in Phaedra Almajid's case via her Louis Freeh-arranged, FIFA-paid lawyer - of confidentiality, Michael Garcia did this.

Or was it Eckert? Or, was it FIFA?

I reasoned that it was FIFA.

Garcia's law firm and Eckert were in a fiduciary relationship with FIFA. As much as they might use the adjective „independent“ to describe the Ethics Committee, it simply wasn't.

### Eckert's disgraceful verdict

If FIFA was paying them a bucket load of money, Garcia and Eckert really only had two options: to walk away, or do as the client asked. Under the leadership of its former president, João Havelange, and under Joseph Blatter, FIFA and its courtesans long lurked in the shadows away from the boundaries of normal, day-to-day conduct.

Whose narrative did Phaedra Almajid and I upset? FIFA's and Blatter's. And the two parties to whom conflicting promises were made: Qatar's Emir Tamim and FFA's Frank Lowy.

FIFA would have reasoned that Phaedra Almajid needed to be discredited because Qatar would host the World Cup in 2022. Her story, and her continuing presence in the media, were getting in the way.

And while Blatter could no longer fulfil his promise to Lowy regarding the



*Im Auftrag zum Emir: Franz Beckenbauer, Frank Lowy. (FOTO: BONITA MERSIADES)*

2022 tournament, the least he could do as a favour was to discredit the inconvenient woman - me - who caused him so much trouble.

All Garcia needed to say was that he could find no corroborating evidence to support what Almajid or I told him. While it wouldn't have been true in my case - and that is all I can comment on - it nonetheless would have done the job if that is what he truly thought to be the case. Instead, FIFA reasoned we needed to be intimidated, discredited and silenced. Garcia obliged. It was textbook treatment of whistleblowers.

It allowed FIFA to brief journalists to ignore us, and it worked with many journalists; those who value their connection to FIFA.

For others, the Eckert summary report showed just how broken FIFA and their deeply rotten culture is, and how FIFA would do whatever it takes to maintain their position.

BACK IN MY hotel room, the phone was ringing hot. My family, 4,000 kilometres away in Sydney, were worried about me. Almajid was talking with me on Skype and alternating between white hot anger and deep distress.

Friends and journalists from around the world were calling. I only spoke with a few people that night.

One was journalist Nick Harris, who was close to Almajid. He wanted to do a back page feature on both of us for the UK's *Mail on Sunday*. Almajid was keen; I was reluctant because I didn't want the tabloid treatment of being viewed as a victim of big, bad FIFA.

I didn't want to accept that label from them.

But because Almajid was keen, and I was happy to stand with her, I agreed to talk with Harris.

„I'll do it on one condition,“ I told him. „I want change out of this. I want football to be better. I want this to start to make a difference.“

A few hours later, Harris fulfilled his side of the bargain - [and I did too](#).

He connected both Almajid and me with British MP, Damian Collins, who had been championing FIFA reform.

Collins said he would invite both of us to speak at a forum in Brussels to be convened by three members of the European Parliament. Almajid wasn't interested, but I was.

I spoke further with Collins and suggested that we also talk with Swiss-based Australian businessman, Jaimie Fuller, whom I met in Aarhus 12 months before and had come to know well. Since our first meeting, Fuller and I had a few discussions about a campaign to rock FIFA's boat, as he had done through his company SKINS with world cycling. We were waiting for the right opportunity - and now here it was. The Eckert summary report, the apparently toothless Garcia report, its treatment of whistleblowers, and a forum at the European Parliament, were giving us the exact platform we were seeking.

Collins, Fuller and I talked, and we agreed it was time to do something about FIFA. The campaign group [#NewFIFANow](#) was born.

AS IT TURNED out, Almajid and I were not the only ones who objected to aspects of the Eckert summary report.

Mike Garcia said he did too. By the next morning, he issued a statement



Korruptionsexperten: Fedor Radmann, Mohamed bin Hammam. (FOTO: BONITA MERSIADES)

from New York saying it was „materially incomplete and erroneous“ with „erroneous representations of the facts and conclusions.“ His biggest concern appeared to be the conclusion from Judge Eckert that there would be no further investigation into the issues surrounding the conduct of the 2018/2022 bids. Blatter emphasised this aspect of Eckert’s report also. Not surprisingly, Blatter’s assessment was there was nothing to see here.

Garcia appealed against Eckert’s report, as did Almajid and I, although for different reasons than Garcia.

The basis for Almajid’s and my appeal was that our confidentiality was broken when we were both promised we would be protected - in direct contravention of a FIFA statute.

My appeal was denied because FIFA deemed it was not admissible. FIFA claimed I was no longer involved in football so the FIFA statutes were not relevant to me. Wrong. I was an active volunteer with two grassroots football clubs in Australia, a member of an A-League club, and a volunteer ExCo member of Australian’s then football media association. I also, by this time, had started-up an independent [football news website](#). What more did I need to do to be „involved“ in football?!

Almajid was given similar reasons.

Garcia’s appeal was also dismissed. FIFA declared his complaint was „not admissible“ because the report was „neither legally binding or appealable“.

Hilarious.

Writing [an oped](#) in *The Guardian* with a call to action to fans to unite behind the need for change that Collins,

Fuller and I were pursuing via #NewFIFANow, I said:

„Let the Fifa pantomime play out: Garcia reports; Eckert summarises; Garcia appeals against the summary; Eckert admonishes Garcia for talking to the media. In other words pull up a chair, take out the popcorn and see what happens next.“

What happened next was three things.

FIFA engaged American legal counsel. In addition to their ongoing arrangement with Swiss firm Niederer Kraft Frey, they engaged Quinn Emmanuel at the end of 2014. They were a perfect fit: one of Quinn Emanuel’s co-founders boasts as one his career highlights that he won a case for a big corporate against a whistleblower.

### Three powerful US firms

Quinn Emanuel’s engagement by FIFA came about after they wrote to FIFA in December 2014 offering their services to defend FIFA in action to be brought by the US Department of Justice. Blatter told me that he did not know about this until 2017 when he read it in a German newspaper. Blatter said neither of the two signatories to the Quinn Emanuel contract - his CEO, Jerome Valcke and Head of Legal, Marco Villiger - thought to inform him either of the Quinn Emanuel contract or the reference to DOJ action.

FIFA also engaged external PR help through another American firm, Teneo, that was co-founded by two people close to both the former President of the United States, Bill Clinton, and the for-

mer Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. It now employs the former CEO of the English Bid, Andy Anson.

Quinn Emanuel and Teneo joined the Freeh Group as three powerful US firms in FIFA’s employ.

The third thing that happened?

Garcia resigned. After 30 months in the job, Garcia concluded what others, including me, had long known.

That FIFA was incapable of reforming itself.

That its culture was deeply flawed.

And that it needed a change in leadership. He connected both Almajid and me with British MP, Damian Collins, who had been championing FIFA reform.

Collins said he would invite both of us to speak at a forum in Brussels to be convened by three members of the European Parliament their ongoing arrangement with Swiss firm Niederer Kraft Frey, they engaged Quinn Emmanuel at the end of 2014. They were a perfect fit: one of Quinn Emanuel’s co-founders boasts as one his career highlights that he won a case for a big corporate against a whistleblower.



*Bonita Mersiades lebt in Sydney.*

*Sie arbeitet als Autorin und Verlegerin, betreut #NewFIFANow, andere Projekte zur Bekämpfung von Sportkriminalität und die Webseite [FootballToday](#). Bis 2010 war Bonita Mersiades Head of corporate and public affairs der FFA, zuvor Teammanagerin der Männer-Nationalmannschaft Socceroos.*

*Der Erlös ihres Buches kommt dem Frauenfußball zugute.*

(FOTO: PLAY THE GAME/THOMAS SØNDERGAARD)

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