

Trump calls FIFA chief to lift suspension on US player: Chauvinism and corruption permeate World Cup

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President Donald Trump has personally intervened with FIFA President Gianni Infantino to overturn a one-game suspension handed to US forward Folarin Balogun, in an episode that lays bare, more crudely than at any previous point in the 2026 World Cup, the subordination of the most popular sports tournament in the world to the US financial oligarchy and Trump personally.

Balogun, the United States' top scorer and Monaco's leading striker this season, was sent off in the Round of 32 match against Bosnia-Herzegovina after a VAR review found he had raked his studs down an opponent's leg and onto his ankle. Under FIFA's disciplinary code, a straight red card carries an automatic one-match ban, applied without exception or appeal for more than 60 years of World Cup history. Balogun was set to miss Monday's Round of 16 match against Belgium.

Trump, who had not been asked by the US Soccer Federation to get involved, called Infantino on his own initiative reportedly after the game Wednesday. By his own account, he did not initially understand why a red card should carry any further consequence at all. "I asked for a review because I didn't think it was a foul," he told reporters, adding that he "didn't know what the hell a red card was" before making the call. That admission of ignorance did not stop him from declaring, in the same breath, "I'm the one who got them to overturn it."

Behind the scenes, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and White House World Cup task force director Andrew Giuliani pressed Infantino directly, while lawyers coordinated with a hedge fund manager and US Soccer donor to prepare legal arguments contesting the VAR review, which were passed on to the federation. Days later, FIFA announced it was suspending the enforcement of Balogun's ban for a "probationary period" of one year, citing Article 27 of its Disciplinary Code, a provision never previously used to nullify an automatic World Cup red-card suspension mid-tournament.

The European football association UEFA denounced the decision as having "crossed a red line," calling it "unprecedented, incomprehensible and unjustifiable." Belgium's federation, denied any explanation of the ruling, warned it would contest Balogun's eligibility. FIFA's Appeal Committee rejected this appeal hours before kickoff.

Infantino, for his part, insisted that FIFA's "judicial bodies are independent" and that he had merely explained the process to Trump. The claim collapses under the weight of precedent. In November, days after dining with Trump at the White House, Portuguese superstar Cristiano Ronaldo had two-thirds of a three-match qualifying suspension deferred under the same probationary mechanism now applied to Balogun.

In December, moreover, Infantino invented an entirely new "FIFA Peace Prize," awarded to Trump after the White House's failed campaign for the Nobel, at the World Cup draw. He likewise gifted Trump a replica of the golden World Cup winners' trophy. FIFA then opened an office inside Trump Tower, paying rent to the Trump family for the privilege.

Appearing before reporters at the White House Monday, Trump and Senator Ted Cruz bantered over the reversal of the suspension.

"On behalf of all Americans, thank you for getting rid of that ridiculous red card," the smirking Texas Republican senator said.

"That was interesting," Trump replied.

"It was spectacular," Cruz continued. "There was a reason the Fifa trophy sat here for as long as it did."

Trump found time for the Infantino call in between events marking the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. That same week, he delivered a speech in Medora, North Dakota, dedicating the \$450 million Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library, in which he dwelt at length on Roosevelt's charge up San Juan Hill and the seizure of Cuba, Guam, the Philippines and Puerto Rico

from Spain in 1898, declaring of that conquest, “they were all ours.”

The instinct to bend FIFA to Washington’s will over a soccer match and the nostalgia for imperial annexation fell squarely together in the would-be Fuhrer’s head as part of Independence Day events. This is a president for whom the affirmation of human equality in the Declaration of Independence must be recast as a celebration of American supremacy and aristocratic privilege over all concerns of society.

Political interference is by no means unprecedented in the history of the sport, though it has rarely been so brazen. Argentine dictator Jorge Videla visited Peru’s locker room ahead of a decisive 1978 group match Argentina needed to win by six goals; Argentina won 6-0. In 1973, FIFA gave Chile a forfeit victory after the Soviet Union refused to play a qualifier in the National Stadium, freshly used by Augusto Pinochet’s junta as a torture and execution center. In 1982, a Kuwaiti sheikh stormed the pitch to browbeat a referee into disallowing a legitimate French goal. Mussolini, who privately held the sport in contempt, used propaganda and pressure on officials to secure Italy’s 1934 title. In 1974, Zaire’s Mobutu Sese Seko allegedly threatened his own players with exile if they lost to Brazil by more than three goals; they lost 3-0.

What distinguishes the Balogun affair is its scale and brazenness: the direct, public, repeated intervention of the president of the world’s dominant imperialist power in the officiating of a world tournament hosted on his own soil.

The episode is riddled with contradictions. Balogun plays for the US team only because he was born in Brooklyn in 2001 when his Nigerian mother was unable to fly home to London while seven months pregnant. This was the result of birthright citizenship under the Fourteenth Amendment that Trump’s administration is actively suing to abolish—not to speak of Trump’s travel bans targeting Nigeria and other majority-Muslim and African countries.

The president who mobilized the machinery of the US state to keep a Nigerian-American striker on the field is simultaneously working to ensure children like him are never recognized as citizens at all. Balogun, notably, has responded with more dignity than his own government, telling reporters he was conscious of “inspiring little kids” watching how “to handle things.” Meanwhile, US players themselves, on learning of the reversal, wondered whether the news was AI-generated. In this Twilight Zone of a tournament, no one would blink if Israel, which never qualified for the tournament, turned up in the semifinals.

None of this is incidental to Infantino’s FIFA. The federation he inherited emerged from the 2015 “FIFA-Gate” indictments, an FBI-led prosecution that toppled his

predecessor Sepp Blatter over bribery charges tied to the Russian and Qatari World Cup bids, conveniently clearing the way for the “clean,” heavily lobbied selection of the joint US-Mexico-Canada bid over Morocco.

Infantino became Washington’s chosen instrument at the head of the world’s richest sporting body—one now facing a fresh criminal complaint filed in France by former UEFA president Michel Platini, alleging a conspiracy of false accusation that blocked Platini’s own path to the FIFA presidency a decade ago. Any US victory over Belgium will be permanently stained by this decision.

Host cities have welcomed visiting fans with real warmth, as hundreds of millions follow teams built increasingly from the ranks of immigrants and their children. That instinctive international solidarity and unity in sport and culture is precisely what the manipulation of FIFA by Trump and Infantino is designed to suppress beneath a fog of national chauvinism and rampant moneymaking.

The Balogun affair joins a growing catalogue: the exclusion of Iran’s team and staff from US soil under threat of bombing, the censorship of Haiti’s kit commemorating the defeat of Napoleon by the first successful anti-slave army, the airport interrogations and expulsions of African, Iranian and Arab players, referees, journalists and fans. Every one of these episodes exposes the same reality: a sport invented and sustained by the working class has been seized by a financial aristocracy and fused to the machinery of an increasingly fascist state.

What this demands is the fight to break the oligarchy’s grip not only on FIFA, but on every cultural, athletic, academic and social institution it has bent to its own enrichment and political use, and to reclaim them as the common inheritance of the international working class.



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