



Welcome Speech at IFA Zurich 2010

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you cordially to the 12th edition of the International Football Arena conference, not counting IFA's four appearances in Asia, two of which in Beijing and one each in Kuala Lumpur and New Delhi.

Every time I'm asked to explain what type of conference the IFA actually is, I call it a 'business meeting'. It's a 'business meeting' about the huge global industry of football.

The conference today and tomorrow will be no different. It will first be about the current and likely future state of players' management. This is to do with transfers, contracts and their terms, flows of money, commissions and the role of agents, who have become just as firmly established figures in modern football as in the worlds of cinema, literature or fashion.

Then follows a presentation about digital tools for building supporter loyalty and the football experience in the era of 'social media'. In other words, it will be about 'interactive value creation in the global business of football'.

The major item on this year's IFA agenda is devoted to football grounds, which are also referred to as 'cathedrals of the modern era'. And again, it's a matter of value creation, of course. However, these monumental structures also combine in themselves aspects of culture, urban planning, energy, transport, social matters, showcase exhibitions and adventure parks.

On Tuesday morning, the stage will be set for a panel of prestigious sponsorship experts debating new ways and tools required in the current setting, and also addressing new target groups to be reached within a continuously growing segment of spectators and supporters.

As a concluding highlight on Tuesday, the IFA has scheduled a subject matter that has caught the imagination not only of sports journalists but also of political and economic pundits. Who is going to be awarded the rights to host the 2018 and 2022 FIFA World Cups? Countries such as Australia, Japan and Russia will appear on stage, with their bid-committee CEOs explaining why they aspire to bring to their home countries the biggest event in team sports.

So the IFA conference is a gathering of people who are keen to talk about business opportunities, to get to know and understand each other, and to explore or discover new avenues.



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And yet, despite this underlying agenda, let's never forget that football is a game, after all. It's a game everyone understands and knows how to play, a game capable of bringing together rich and poor, tall and small, fat and slim, or dark- and light-skinned. The game of football probably is the most universal of all languages.

Reading the International Herald Tribune a few months ago, I came across a documentary film entitled 'Pelada', which is the Brazilian term for street soccer and literally means 'naked', but in this context equates to 'bare bones' or 'stripped to the essential'.

Four Americans (including a former female professional player) travelled to 25 countries with a football tucked under their arms, as it were, and went around looking for people playing a spontaneous match of football on streets, greens or village squares. The travellers were invited to join the game by strangers whose existence they had had no idea of up to then. A mere hour later, they would be sitting in those strangers' homes having dinner with them. The goals were marked by objects dropped to the ground such as workers' helmets in South Africa, bicycles in France and t-shirts in Peru. The travellers played with prison inmates in Bolivia and battled against so-called 'freestylers' in China, and the American woman put on a headscarf to sneak her way playfully into a men's team in Iran.

There was one episode in the 'Pelada' documentary that I found particularly moving. A young man in a Nairobi slum set about disposing of a huge foul-smelling pile of rubbish to turn a bare brown field into a football pitch. This field became the only place for people to meet in his part of the city. Every day, players of all stripes come together there, each putting 20 Kenyan shillings into a pot and playing football to win that pot as if it were the Champions League trophy. They are cheered on by a delighted crowd of people young and old, tall and small, dark- and light-skinned, and all of them poor, I guess.

In their soccer odyssey on film, the four Americans have captured the essence of football, way out of reach of dazzling floodlights and TV cameras and miles away from manicured football turf.

'Pelada' has touched me emotionally because this film is testimony to football's natural ability to move people and bring them together, demonstrating that there is more to football than merchandising, broadcasting rights and ticket sales.

This is what we should never come to disregard, not even in a business meeting.
Thank you.

Marcel Schmid, Chairman International Football Arena.



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