

## The unknown rule makers by Stuart Fuller

Many watchers of the beautiful game may not realise the part that Great Britain still has in setting the rules of the game across the world. Virtually everyone thinks that it is FIFA who make (and break) the rules but they are wrong. The International Football Association Board (IFAB) is the body that determines the Laws of the Game of Association Football since it was founded in 1886. Their original mandate was to agree standardised laws for international competition, and has since acted as the "guardian" of the internationally used rules from their office in Zurich and under the guidance of General Secretary Lukas Brud.

It is a separate body from FIFA, though FIFA is represented on the board and but holds only 50% of the voting power. As a legacy of association football's origins in Great Britain, the other organisations represented are the governing bodies of the game in the four countries of the United Kingdom. Amendments to the Laws, including any changes, require a three-quarter majority vote, meaning that FIFA's support is necessary but not sufficient for a motion to pass.

Each UK association has one vote and FIFA has four. IFAB deliberations must be approved by three-quarters of the vote, which translates to at least six votes. Thus, FIFA's approval is necessary for any IFAB decision, but FIFA alone cannot change the Laws of the Game—they need to be agreed by at least two of the UK members. There is also a quorum requirement that at least four of the five member associations, one of which must be FIFA, have to be present for a meeting to proceed. The Board meets twice a year, once to decide on possible changes to the rules governing the game of Football and once to deliberate on its internal affairs. The IFAB today consists of 31 members, including everyone's favourite footballing figure, Sepp Blatter. The FA's representation includes Greg Dyke, ex-Manchester United CEO David Gill and former referee David Elleray.

At the last AGM, held in February in Belfast, there were a number of interesting proposals on the agenda. FIFA proposed that a fourth substitute be allowed in games that had entered Extra Time; the US federation proposed using the "stopping the clock" method of timing games, similar to that used in Rugby Union and NFL; There was a preliminary discussion around the potential use of 'sin bins' and one that will be interesting to see how it is interpreted, the ending of "triple punishment" for denying a goal-scoring opportunity in the penalty area which leads to a penalty, a red card and a subsequent one-match ban. The proposed new rule, which came into effect on the 1 June 2015, sees the one-match ban being dropped, as the red card and penalty are deemed to be sufficient enough. That decision annoyed UEFA who had pushed for the red card to be made into a yellow card.

Other hard hitting decisions the board have taken in recent years are the banning of Snoods, the rule about sock tape having to be the same colour as the socks and that assistant referees are not allowed to kick the ball back to players if it is at their feet. We are often quick to blame officials but they are simply following the rules set by the blazers in their five star hotels around Europe twice a year. So in years to come when half-time breaks are extended to 30 minutes to accommodate TV commercials, or we get four quarters instead of two halves, you know who to blame.