

Volleygate: A SHOWCASE OF GREED AND MISMANAGEMENT

Legal threats from the leaders of world volleyball did not stop Play the Game from letting the excluded Argentine leader Goijman present his shocking revelations about the FIVB

by Marcus Hoy

If Play the Game 2005 were to be remembered for just one topic, it would no doubt be the harrowing tale of greed and corruption in international volleyball that has come to be known as 'Volleygate'.

What started as an administrative dispute involving Argentina's governing body had by the time of the conference become volleyball's biggest-ever scandal, taking up more column inches than the sport had received during the last Olympic Games!

At the centre of the story is a mild mannered sports administrator, Mario Goijman, whose shocking revelations belied his innocuous appearance. His hard-hitting address had reporters reaching for their notebooks, and the weight of his story was reflected in the number of articles that subsequently appeared in mainstream newspapers across the world.

Threat against Play the Game

The fact that Goijman was able to address Play the Game at all was a story in itself.

After learning of his planned attendance, the International Volleyball Federation fired off a lengthy mail threatening each member of the Play the Game Board with legal action if Goijman was allowed to appear, and giving Play the Game Director Jens Sejer Andersen just three weeks to withdraw his invitation.



Mario Goijman has documented corruption in international volleyball tirelessly and at great personal expense for several years.

Signed by the FIVB's Secretary General Jean Pierre Sepey, the mail concluded with the assertion that "your debate cannot take place without violating the law".

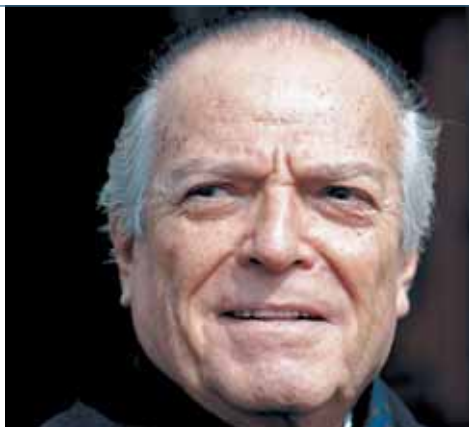
Since no law in Denmark or Switzerland prohibits speeches at conferences, the threats only strengthened Play the Game's determination to put the issue on stage. A reply was drafted in which it was stated that the FIVB were welcome to join the debate – but Goijman's invite would not be withdrawn.

Secret commissions and false invoices

So what were the revelations that the FIVB was so eager to stifle? Mario Goijman answered this question in full when he took to the podium in Copenhagen.

FIVB President Rubén Acosta, he charged, has been enriching himself at the sport's expense for many years through false expense claims, dubious property deals, secret commissions on contracts and invoices from false companies. Almost a hundred volleyball leaders have quit during Mr Acosta's reign, he told delegates, and many more have been sacked for refusing to toe the line.

Mario Goijman's long list of FIVB misdemeanours dates back to the 1988 men's World Volleyball Championships in Argentina, an event in which he, as national President, was heavily involved. Soon after the games were over, he began to express concerns over the accuracy of the accounts, and these initial accusations led to a spiralling paper trail of forgery, false accounting, secret contract options and crooked property deals involving up to 19 million US dollars.



Ruben Acosta has ruled the International Volleyball Federation with an iron fist for many years. Photo credit: Scanpix

"I've got back to work but my heart is still in Copenhagen, where it was as if I was in a dream. The opportunity to voice the sporting Third World's anguish was something I'd always recall humbly and faithfully."

Pulakesh Mukhopadhyay,
News Editor, The Statesman, India

Update: Swiss court did not punish forgery

In March 2006, FIVB president Ruben Acosta, ex-secretary general Jean-Pierre Sepey and former controller Franz Schmied stood trial in Switzerland charged with forgery and withholding information from the FIVB congress about commissions paid to Ruben Acosta for sponsor and television contracts.

All three were acquitted of the charges even if the judge found it was forgery to remove a document mentioning commissions to the tune of 8.3 million Swiss francs from the FIVB accounts. But the judge found no proof of intent to do damage or benefit unlawfully from the act and therefore could not impose a sentence.

Nevertheless, Ruben Acosta and Franz Schmied each had to pay 4300 Swiss francs to cover legal costs.



Moral will win, predicted Mario Gojman in his conference presentation. But moral did not win when FIVB was on trial in Switzerland.

Find all the details on Play the Game's themepage about Volleygate at www.playthegame.org

The accusations eventually led to not only Gojman, but also the entire Argentine Volleyball Federation, being expelled from the FIVB – meaning youth and adult volleyball teams were excluded from international tournaments.

Despite harsh criticism from, among others, the IOC's Ethics Committee and ongoing court proceedings in Switzerland for alleged crimes, Gojman expressed his regrets that to this day, Rubén Acosta retains his position as FIVB president.'

Malpractice must be exposed

The case took a surprising twist in August 2005 when Acosta fired Jean-Pierre Sepey for alleged 'financial misconduct', and the FIVB Secretariat was reorganised under Acosta's personal authority.

In December 2005, Sepey launched a head-on attack on his former employer, alleging

that he was fired because Acosta saw him as a potential rival. Sepey claimed that within a short space of time, 20 employees have left the FIVB headquarters – some voluntarily, others because they were pushed – due to unacceptable pressure from the FIVB President.

Sepey's falling out with the Acosta and his subsequent allegations do nothing to weaken Mario Gojman's assertion that corruption is rife within the higher echelons of volleyball's governing body.

In a world short on fundamental principles, he concluded in his Play the Game address, sport has a moral duty to expose malpractice in order to keep its own ethical values intact. Only when they shed their culture of secrecy, he asserted, can governing bodies such as the FIVB be free of the suspicion of corruption.

Gojman's allegations against the FIVB:

- falsifying the auditor's report on FIVB's financial status in 2000 before it was presented to the World Congress in 2002
- withholding information about the payment of commissions to the FIVB president for a total amount of 8,32 million SFr (6.5 million US\$)
- purchasing real estate in Lausanne for 1,7 million SFr whilst hiding from FIVB's board of administration that the property had belonged to the Acosta family since 1984
- failing to record 4,85 million SFr paid by the IOC to FIVB in FIVB accounts (3,8 million US\$)