When the ISL marketing company went bust in the spring of 2001 – they'd paid too many bribes and run out of money – it emerged that ISL had failed to pay nearly £50 million it owed to FIFA, money paid by the Brazilian network Globo and the Japanese Dentsu companies for World Cup rights.

FIFA President Sepp Blatter had no choice but to report the alleged crime to the authorities in Zug and he issued a press release naming a number of ISL executives, mere functionaries at the company.

Curiously Blatter omitted from his list of alleged criminals the name of the key man in all the secret dealings of ISL, the inheritor of Dassler's black book of kickbacks, the architect of modern ISL bribes, the tall, angular, grey-haired, reticent figure of Jean-Marie Weber.

Blatter was sending a clear signal. Jean-Marie was to be protected. He was too important to be messed with. He knew too much. Jean-Marie knows everything.

The Zug authorities knew what pressures they were up against. Undeterred, they hired in one of their former Investigating Magistrates who had gone to live in Vienna. His name is Thomas Hildbrand, an investigator of great integrity and great determination. A man with a developed nose for corruption. Hildbrand was given the FIFA case and promptly disappeared from public view.

But Blatter was hearing what was going on, who was being questioned, what documents and bank records Hildbrand was gathering from the wreckage of the ISL company.

This was disastrous. Decades of kickbacks were being uncovered. What could be done?

Blatter moved secretly to kill the investigation. He wrote to the authorities in Zug and withdrew FIFA's complaint. They really weren't bothered anymore.

Hildbrand ignored Blatter and went on digging. Blatter induced friendly reporters at papers like the Financial Times to publish stories alleging that Hildbrand was unfit to conduct the investigation. Hildbrand and his bosses in Zug ignored these smears.

In May 2005 Investigator Hildbrand emerged from the shadows, his investigation completed, and issued an indictment against the ISL executives – including Jean-Marie Weber – accusing them of embezzling that £50 million from FIFA and a number of related financial crimes.

Subsequently Hildbrand's report has been adopted by the Zug Prosecutor's office and the case has been sent for trial...
A young man from Guatemala was present with his camera at almost every session of Play the Game. The man is Juan José Marroquin who was busy documenting the conference for use in an upcoming documentary film about corruption in sport.

It was the excellent reporter Jean-François Tanda who got hold of crucial evidence.

It emerged that this was Hildbrand's second application to the court. He'd been there earlier, asking to use documents from two secret ISL-owned offshore enterprises in his case against the ISL executives. He was given that permission by the Vaduz judge. Now he was back - he wanted to use these documents again in his new investigation.

Bribes for TV and marketing rights

The first enterprise was a Foundation ISL had set up in Liechtenstein. It was called Nunca - Spanish for "Never."

In documents filed separately in a Berlin court, one of the shareholders of ISL described the function of Nunca as "to pay bribes to obtain licences for TV and marketing rights for sports events, for example, the football World Cup."

In our parallel investigations, James and I discovered that in the late 1990s ISL had secretly transferred nearly €20 million to Nunca to pay bribes into the new century.

But the money wasn't paid out from Nunca. It travelled across the Atlantic to another company set up in the British Virgin Islands. It was called Sunbow and if you were on the secret Sunbow money distribution list, the sun would shine forever.

Back in Vaduz in April last year, less than two months before the World Cup kicked off in Germany, the court was told by Hildbrand that the liquidator of the bankrupt ISL company had secretly forced some of the sports officials who took bribes to repay some of the money.

The court was then told that Hildbrand was investigating his belief that the money had not been repaid by the crooks - but had been repaid by FIFA! [...]

In February this year Magistrate Hildbrand turned up in South Germany with some tough questions for a potential - but unwilling - witness.

Hildbrand's investigation has typically gone quiet again - he doesn't talk about it - but I can assure you that it continues. [...]

Cross your fingers that Hildbrand does the job. The signs are promising - and that will be the end of an era of FIFA corruption.

Read the whole presentation on www.playthegame.org

For a young filmmaker trying to penetrate the murky world of sports corruption, Play the Game has proven to be an invaluable source of information and networking opportunities.

"I have read everything on Play the Game's website, and at this conference I have been given the chance to interact with people who have great experience in this field," says Marroquin who was also excited about the attitude to networking at Play the Game.

"I have been treated as an equal here. Everyone is on the same playing field, and I am just as important as those doing it for a long time."

Over the next year, Marroquin will travel to a number of countries to make interviews and film on location for cases of sports corruption he has learnt about at Play the Game. He plans to finish the film by the beginning of 2009.

"I got inspired by other journalists who are chasing for stories, mostly in the corruption part of our sports world. I think this gives me new energy to go on with these subjects."

John Volkers, Journalist de Volkskrant, the Netherlands.