



World Cup bid must be all-in or it will fail



NEIL FLETT

ASSUMING that FIFA investigations into alleged improper bid practices find that Australia has not crossed the line between robust bidding and something unacceptable, the challenge remains as to whether our bid will prove attractive enough to have the majority of the FIFA vote for us to host the World Cup in 2022.

There is nothing black and white about these gigantic bids. The philosophical and ethical challenge for each bidding country is: do we do everything we can do within the stated guidelines to win the bid, or do we decide to do less, knowing that every other country bidding may not be willing to be as altruistic? Sydney won the 2000 Olympic Games 45-43 over Beijing. Given that the final decision came down to one vote short of a recount or deciding vote by the president of the International Olympic Committee, what could Sydney have left out of its bid? The answer is: nothing.

From the point of view of winning or losing, and without my knowing what Football Federation Australia might have done or not done, the guidelines are the same for every bidding country and we would be naive if we thought that others are not using everything within those guidelines to support their bid.

You either decide to win, or don't bother bidding. That includes using bid experts and lobbyists, because they know the decision-makers and their needs. And it includes favours for voting countries, and, yes, even jewellery to voters' wives if that is allowed.

These bids are massive in terms of time, money and resources. With the decision due late this year, each bidding country has spent years and millions of dollars getting their bid ready. Each country will have ticked all the boxes needed to win — and if not they will claim to have done so — including finance, government support, venues, security, accommodation, transport, community support, environment, social responsibility and a host of others.

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But none of those factors will single-handedly win the cup. Nor will having every existing venue contracted, every stadium designed or built, all the sponsorship locked away. Those elements alone will not win the cup (although not having them could well lose it).

Anyone studying the bid so far would see Australia's World Cup positioning as being primarily "Come Play". Like Sydney's 2000 Olympic bid, we are offering the "no worries" World Cup, where players and spectators will have fun and relax in a safe and secure environment.

Will this be enough? Probably not. Something else is also needed: legacy.



It's the legacy that will be left when the last fan has gone home. It's what will have changed in the world of football because Australia - and not another country - staged the World Cup. And it's what will have changed in Australia after we have hosted it.

So the challenge now is whether FIFA will see that Australia hosting the World Cup will leave an important enough legacy for world football.

What is the legacy Australia can offer? London's Olympic bid legacy was introducing millions of children to sport, Rio's summer Olympic bid for 2016 offered a legacy that would change South America, and South Africa took the soccer World Cup to the African continent.

When Sydney won the Olympic Games in 1993, our strategy was to deliver professionally organised games, for the athletes, in the friendliest city on earth. It worked then; the question is, is it is enough to work now?

The major part of Australia's legacy is that by letting us host the World Cup, FIFA completes the "world game". Every other continent in the world has had the world's biggest single sporting event, except Australia and this region. It's the giant hole in the world of football.

For FIFA it would fulfil its own philosophy: "For the game, for the world."

FIFA can complete its world by filling in the final box and putting a tick next to Australia. Couple this with Australia's alignment and proximity to Asia and the Pacific, and there you have the all-important legacy.

As for the legacy that the cup will leave Australia, it would be the fast-tracking of soccer in a nation dominated by other football codes. It would be the catalyst that establishes football as the dominant code in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.

Neil Flett has worked on many international sporting bids including for the Sydney Olympics. His company rogenSi was also involved with Vancouver's 2010 winter Olympics bid and Melbourne's 2002 Commonwealth Games bid, among others.