

World Cup Bids Mix Football, Politics

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ZURICH, Switzerland — Sports and politics mixed at the highest level Tuesday, as government leaders stepped up support for their countries' bids to host the World Cup in 2018 or 2022.

British Prime Minister David Cameron, Prince William and David Beckham arrived in Zurich to help England's 2018 team limit the potential damage caused by a BBC television investigation broadcast Monday that alleged corrupt dealings by four voters from FIFA's executive committee.

"I've only got one focus here and that's trying to bring the World Cup home for England," Cameron said.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has yet to decide whether he will travel to Zurich before Thursday's vote, sports minister and 2018 bid chairman Vitaly Mutko said. "He will speak for himself, probably tomorrow," Mutko said.

The U.S. government said Attorney General Eric Holder would join former President Bill Clinton at FIFA headquarters on Wednesday when the five 2022 candidates make their final

30-minute presentations.

Australia has sent its most senior state official, Governor General Quentin Bryce, to Zurich. She was meeting with FIFA president Sepp Blatter on Tuesday.

FIFA said it had no intention of examining BBC allegations that three voters — Ricardo Teixeira, Nicolas Leoz and Issa Hayatou — took kickbacks from FIFA's former marketing agency from 1989 to 1999.

FIFA said the matter was dealt with by a Swiss criminal court two years ago and no official was charged.

The International Olympic Committee said it would open an ethics probe into the allegations against Hayatou, who has been an IOC member since 2001.

FIFA was still seeking to end a stalemate over whether its smallest continental region, Oceania, can vote Thursday. Oceania wants to replace its suspended president Reynald Temarii, who was banned by FIFA for ethics violations.

Temarii has been reluctant to waive his right to appeal, which FIFA rules require before his deputy, David Chung from Papua New Guinea, can replace him.

Chung's presence would bring the number of voters to 23 and could alter a delicate balance in both contests.

Leaders of the joint Spain-Portugal bid believe that they have eight first-round votes secured in the 2018 race that includes England, Russia and Belgium/Netherlands. The European candidates make their on-stage presentations Thursday morning.

The 2022 contest pits the United States and Australia against Japan, South Korea and Qatar. FIFA investigated but found no evidence of alleged vote trading between Spain-Portugal and Qatar.

With both bid races too close to call, last-minute lobbying by government leaders could yet be decisive.

Cameron was meeting FIFA vice president Jack Warner from Trinidad and Tobago, who was targeted by a BBC investigation over an alleged ticket scam before the World Cup in South Africa. Warner can potentially deliver three votes from his CONCACAF region that are deemed crucial to England's chances.

FIFA requires complete government support to underwrite World Cup investment, plus tax and legal breaks during the monthlong tournament.

Putin has assured FIFA that Russian visa entry rules would be waived for all foreign fans with match tickets.

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