

FIFA's recent scandal risks overshadowing 2015 Women's World Cup

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VANCOUVER – Even as the flames of corruption, bribery, and scandal rip through FIFA and get closer to the top of the organization by the day, the show must go on.

The 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup kicks off Saturday in Edmonton with Canada taking on China, less than a week after disgraced FIFA president Sepp Blatter [resigned from his post](#). FIFA Secretary General Jerome Valcke was originally scheduled to attend Thursday's tournament opening press conference in Vancouver but was a late scratch. The official word from FIFA was that Valcke had to remain in Zurich, Switzerland to attend to matters at the organization's head office. It wasn't long after, that [reports emerged linking Valcke to similar criminal transgressions](#) that saw [14 current or former FIFA executive or associates indicted](#) last week on charges of fraud, racketeering, and money laundering.

For the next month Canada will host some of the world's best athletes and the continued growth of the women's game and its stars like Canada's own Christine Sinclair should be celebrated. FIFA and the CSA boast that close to one million tickets have been sold for the 2015 Women's World Cup. It's also the first time that 24 nations will participate in the women's tournament, meaning that more games are being played and more women are involved in soccer at the highest level than ever before.

"We're very proud and very humbled to be putting on the FIFA Women's World Cup here in Canada. We expect fantastic football to be played and we look forward to some fantastic results," said Canada Soccer Association president Victor Montagliani.

Unfortunately the lead-up to the action has been overshadowed by the actions taken by a number of high-ranking FIFA officials. Despite repeated efforts by FIFA's media relations manager to steer the conversation toward the beautiful game, Thursday was dominated by questions about the scandal. So how badly will the recent revelations

sully the upcoming tournament?

"Well, it depends on the media," said Lydia Nsekera, the chairwoman for FIFA's Committee for Women's Football and a member of the FIFA Executive Committee. "We want women's football to be promoted because it's essential that this tournament happens in good conditions. It's important that this World Cup that's happening here in Canada be well covered by the media. If we could have a little break to talk solely about this World Cup and wait to talk about what's happening with FIFA in July that would be great."

Well, it's too late for that. And for FIFA to ask for a reprieve on the subject of scandal is too rich. To be fair though, it's a strategy that has worked before. We invest in sports because we love the games. We'll turn a blind eye to the dirty behind-the-scenes dealings because the action and the athletes are so compelling.

However, the systematic corruption within FIFA runs so viciously deep and its general conduct so ugly that it could challenge that precedent.

The women's players are wonderful ambassadors for the game. It's a standard their superiors fail to live up to and it's why this month's World Cup risks to be an afterthought, or at the very least see its potential for global impact minimized. If they manage to rise above the wreckage, it will be because of the talent and grace of the women involved.

"I actually think that it's a positive thing that the first tournament after whatever happened last week is the Women's World Cup," said Montagliani. "Because women's football is a very pure form of football. And I think women's football can shine some light in the dark clouds that are hanging over the game."

It won't be long now before the games come into greater focus – we hope. Because it's the least the athletes participating at this World Cup deserve. If not, FIFA only has itself and the alleged crimes of its power-brokers to blame.

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