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Grondona denies Qatar payment

ESPNsoccer.net staff

Argentine Football Association president Julio Grondona has denied receiving a huge payment from Qatar which could have influenced his vote for the award of the 2022 World Cup.

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The choice of Qatar to host the 2022 World Cup has raised eyebrows in some quarters (GettyImages)

The *Wall Street Journal* reported on Friday that a former member of the Qatar bid team had revealed that "at least one adviser recommended that the Qatar Football Association make a payment of \$78.4 million to help the Argentina Football Association, or AFA, dig out of a financial crisis that threatened the country's domestic league. This person said the payment was meant to help Qatar's relationship with AFA President Julio Grondona, who is a member of FIFA's executive committee."

The FIFA ballot was secret and it is unknown which bid Grondona voted for, but Qatar was awarded the right to host the tournament in 2022 after beating United States in the final round of voting.

Grondona has strongly denied that the AFA received any payment from Qatar and has denied suggestions that the association is burdened by oppressive debt.

"There has to be an end to playing with my good name. Why on earth would the association have a debt of that size?" Grondona told *Telam*.

"I am not going to give any credence to whatever people may say. The fact is the AFA has a solid contract with the Argentine government and it is all going quite well."

Thursday's events in Zurich, which also saw Russia awarded the 2018 tournament, have been tainted by accusations of corruption, with FIFA in the build up to the vote dismissing suggestions that Qatar had colluded with the Spain/Portugal bid in order to ensure mutual support.

The chief executive of England's failed 2018 bid team, Andy Anson, says Qatar's rivals feared an agreement had been reached with Spain/Portugal.

"The USA knew that a deal with Spain was done," Anson said. "They knew Qatar started with seven votes and they knew the influence of the Qataris also extended into parts of Africa. What surprised me is the number of Europeans who must have voted for Qatar.

"That was the folly of the dual bidding process. Spain were screwed by what happened because by doing the deal they upset a lot of people by siding with Qatar.

"Deal-making is the nature of the game but there are limits. You have to play straight. If there is corruption, that is illegal, unethical and immoral. If there is just a handshake, any bidder would have done the same. But there are too many grey areas and there has to be a line drawn."

As recriminations continue over FIFA's bidding process and the motivation for the 22 members of the executive committee who voted in Zurich, Netherlands/Belgium ambassador Ruud Gullit has also expressed his frustration with the final outcome.

The Low Countries' bid attracted four votes in the first round of voting, eliminating England which picked up only two, before then seeing its support drop to only two votes in the second round.

"I have to put big question marks against the voting," Gullit said in the *Sunday Mirror*. "I am stunned by the fact that the Holland/Belgium bid got four votes in the first round. And when England had gone out after the first round, we only got two! One day I will find out which game was being played in Zurich."

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