

BRITISH OLYMPIC FOOTBALL

A deal to permit an all-English team to compete under the Team GB banner at the London 2012 Olympics was today agreed by the four home nations.

The Great Britain Olympic football team of 1908: there has not been but there has not been a combined team since 1972

In a letter signed and delivered to Fifa this morning the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland football associations waived their objections to the idea of a British team playing in London as long as no players from their unions are approached.

The agreement, which will deny the best players from the three nations the chance to appear on the Olympic stage, has to be ratified by Fifa and the IOC before the team is assured of appearing.

The non-English unions have been resistant to the idea of a British team because they feared it would threaten their independence within Fifa. This deal is intended to protect that, effectively meaning they will turn a blind eye to the 2012 team.

Fifa president Sepp Blatter has made it clear that he would accept an all-English team but warned the other nations to keep their distance in case it threatened their status in future.

The Irish, Welsh and Scots have softened their stance after it became clear that their intransigence, which looked small-minded and obstructive, was damaging their reputation internationally. They intervened to prevent a British women's team appearing at the Beijing Olympics last year despite England having earned a qualifying berth.

Daily Telegraph May 2009

FIFA PRESIDENT Sepp Blatter today announced he planned to launch a review into the Olympic 2012 football tournament as he again urged Britain to field a team of Englishman in the event to avoid the fear of the Home Countries losing their independence.

The build-up to this year's event in Beijing has been marred by rows over top European clubs refusing to release players over the age of 23.

Spanish giants Barcelona, along with German clubs Werder Bremen and Schalke, have appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in a bid to stop its Argentinian midfielder Lionel Messi from competing at the Games and a ruling is expected within the next 48 hours.

FIFA insist clubs must release their under-23 players for international duty based on a regulation passed by the congress in 1988 but now they have also insisted that over-age players must also be allowed to travel to take part in the tournament.

Blatter, a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), is keen to avoid a similar row at London 2012.

He said: "In the future I think it is necessary we have an exact and precise ruling. It has been decided for 2012 to avoid any misunderstandings and problems - plus or not plus three overage players - that the whole item of the presence of football in the Olympic Games shall be discussed immediately after the conclusion of the 2008 Olympic Games, together with the IOC.

"The discussion will be open and is [designed] to have a clear and clean situation for everybody for the 2012 Olympics.

"It is not only a question of solidarity. It is also a question of respect to the Olympic spirit to let the young players have the experience. Jurgen Klinsmann wrote in his book: 'The moment I received the bronze medal in the Olympics in Seoul 1988 when Germany beat Italy it was my number one outstanding emotion'. We need the leagues and the clubs but we need players. Even if the ruling is negative for the players they should stay here, they should play here."

The FIFA and IOC review could see an end to the current rule which allows each country to select three players over the age of 23, a loophole which has allowed former world footballer of the year Ronaldinho, 28, to be selected by Brazil.

FIFA last discussed the possibility of turning the Olympic football tournament into an under-23 competition back in 2006 but congress decided to retain the three overage players for the Beijing Games.

It is ironic that, bearing in mind Blatter's sometimes difficult relationship with the English Premier League, that none of the clubs affected by losing key players - most notably Liverpool - have protested to CAS, something he praised them for.

But Blatter acknowledged the determination of the British Olympic Association (BOA) to enter a team for the 2012 football tournament is set to cause its own problems.

He said: "The 2012 Games will be played in London. There is another problem there because the four British associations have to put in one team which would be called Great Britain. It is a unique problem. They have four individual associations. They have one Olympic association."

Scotland and Wales are refusing to co-operate with the BOA because they fear that if they do it will lead to them losing their independence to compete in events like the World Cup and European Championships.

Blatter repeated his suggestion that the BOA field a team of Englishman, using as an example of Britain's curling team which won the Olympic gold medal at the Salt Lake City Winter Games in 2002 and consisted of just Scots.

He said: "The first Olympic Games after the second World War were organised in London. There was a British football team there. Therefore, also in 2012 there will be a British team. For us it is not important if the players are all from England."

Insideworldfootball.biz, August 2009

HOPEFUL: British Olympic Association chief executive Andy Hunt still hoping for an Olympic football team with all four home nations.

Great Britain have not entered the Olympic football competition since 1960 but will qualify automatically in two years' time as the home nation.

Political wranglings have made the issue of a Great Britain football team a thorny one with the Northern Irish, Welsh and Scottish FAs wary of an overpowering English presence.

Their concerns are that the Olympic team would serve as a Trojan horse for unification, meaning the other home nations would lose their independent status with world governing body Fifa.

The three FAs in opposition have long been forthright in their stance but last year confirmed they would not stand in the way if a team comprised entirely of English players was formed - a move backed by then Sports Minister Gerry Sutcliffe.

His replacement, Hugh Robertson, has put the resolution of the issue towards the top of his list of priorities while Lord Sebastian Coe yesterday claimed the British public still wanted to see a team comprised of players from all four nations.

And BOA chief executive Hunt confirmed a final decision is far from set in stone.

"We have not resigned ourselves to the fact that the team is just going to be English, our position is that we continue to work with the FA and the home nations on finding a solution," said Hunt.

"We need to resolve how we are going to field a GB men's and women's football team and I sincerely hope that will be the case and we will continue discussions with the FA in the coming months.

"Hopefully we will reach a conclusion point and a set of qualification and selection criteria to make sure we can field a British men's and women's team at London 2012."

MoreThanTheGames.com, July 2010

Bale's dream of playing in the Olympics boosted by legal fight

Tottenham star Gareth Bale's dream of playing for Great Britain at the 2012 Olympics could be boosted by legal action taken by two Scottish women footballers.

Welshman Bale and the likes of Sunderland's Scotland goalkeeper Craig Gordon would be in line to play - as over-age players - for a GB men's under-23 team at the London Games.

Golden boy: Gareth Bale hopes to play for Great Britain at the 2012 London Olympics

But the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish FAs insist that they want no part in British Olympic teams for fear of jeopardising their status in tournaments such as the World Cup and European Championship or the greater likelihood of losing their automatic seats on the eight-man International Football Association Board.

Now the two Scotland women's internationals are taking advice on employment law should the Scottish FA take sanctions against them if they take up invitations to play at London 2012.

No Scotland player is comfortable speaking publicly on this, hence continued secrecy over the players' identities. But the Arsenal Ladies trio of striker Julie Fleeting, 30, (115 goals in 117 Scotland games), midfielder Kim Little, 20, and Jennifer Beattie, 19, would have excellent cases for inclusion in a GB team.

To speak on the subject, the women need prior permission from the SFA, where a spokesman said any Scot wanting to play for Team GB would be 'educated on the stance we've taken and made aware that in eyes of the fans it would be an act of treachery, for personal gain over the collective interest.

They would need to know they'd face a backlash'.

The British Olympic Association want a team selected on merit, not nationality, and are prepared to join legal battle to make that happen.

The former BOA chief executive Simon Clegg tells me he wrote to Fleeting a few years ago, offering support after hearing she was interested in Team GB.

Mail on Sunday 13 March 2011

FURTHER READING

Menary, Steve - 'GB United? British Olympic football and the end of the amateur dream' (Pitch 2010)

Busby, Matt - 'My Story As Told To David R Jack' (Souvenir Press, 1957)

Cavallini, Rob - 'Play Up Corinth – A History of the Corinthian Football Club' (Stadia 2007)

Grayson, Edward - 'Corinthians and Cricketers: And Towards a New Sporting Era' (Yore Publications 1996)

Hampton, Janie - 'The Austerity Olympics - When the Games Came To London in 1948' (Aurum 2008)

Hilton, Christopher - 'Hitler's Olympics – the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games (Sutton Publishing 2006)

Inglis, Simon - 'League Football and the men who made it' (Willow 1988)

Jacobs, Norman - 'Vivian Woodward: Football's Gentleman' (Tempus 2005)

Porter, Dilwyn et al 'Amateurs & Professionals in Postwar British Sport' by (Routledge 2000)

Walters, Guy - 'Berlin Games: How Hitler Stole The Olympic Dream' (John Murray 2007)

Walvin, James - 'The People's Game – the Social History of British Football' (Allen Lane 1975)

USEFUL WEBSITES

www.morethanthegames.co.uk

www.olympics.org.uk – British Olympic Association