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Uefa relishes role as judge and jury . . . so Mourinho can go hang

BY MARTIN SAMUEL

"MY DAD always believed 'fight fire with fire'," Harry Hill, the comedian, said, "which is probably why he was thrown out of the fire brigade."

In certain instances, though, father Hill had a point. For José Mourinho and Chelsea, this is no time for half-measures. Faced with Uefa's blanket refusal to indulge in anything resembling a fair, unprejudiced hearing, the club have no option but to arrive in Switzerland this month, guns blazing, with a legal brigade bigger than the first-team squad, ready for war. No apologies for starting today's column with a gag, either. You have to look to the world of comedy to find pre-trial statements as inappropriate as those issued by William Gaillard, the Uefa director of communications, on Monday.

Blackadder Goes Forth, episode two: *Corporal Punishment*. Blackadder is court-martialled for his life, accused of shooting and eating a messenger pigeon, Speckled Jim, owned and loved by his superior, General Melchett. At the trial, the identity of the presiding judge comes as a shock.

Melchett: "Well, come on, then. Come on. Get this over in five minutes, then we can have a spot of lunch. The court is now in session, General Sir Anthony Hogmanay Melchett in the chair. The case before us is that of the Crown versus Captain Edmund Blackadder, [shouting] the Flanders Pigeon Murderer! Oh, hand me the black cap, I'll be needing that."

In what way is this different from Gaillard's astonishing pronouncements at Uefa's headquarters this week? Apart from the fact that one speech is fictitious and exaggerated for comic effect, none at all. First, incredibly, is the real one.

Gaillard: "We are in the presence of false statements. There is a contradiction between what Mourinho says and what Chelsea say in their report. The truth is that none of the three [men charged] were in a position where they could have seen that taking place [the alleged meeting between Anders Frisk, the referee, and Frank Rijkaard, the Barcelona coach]. We are talking about incidents that brought the game into disrepute over a two-week period, a conspiracy to put pressure on match officials. It obviously poisons the atmosphere and can lead to violent acts by supporters. A totally unnecessary situation. Chelsea have been using lies as a pre-match tactic. They were trying to qualify for the next round by putting pressure on referees. They were ready to use disloyal methods. There is no place in football for this type of behaviour."

Melchett: "He's a scoundrel and a rotter and he's going to be shot. However, before we proceed to the formality of sentencing the



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deceased — I mean the defendant — I think we'd all rather enjoy the case for the prosecution.”

So would we, were it ever to be made public. Uefa's quick-capsule justification, outlined by Gaillard a full ten days before the hearing and as good as labelled “the truth”, is not as watertight as it would have the world believe. For a start, having accused Chelsea of inconsistency, Uefa has compiled an official report awash with contradictory statements over what was said, by whom and to what intention.

One example: on Monday, Gaillard stated that Mourinho had confronted Frisk angrily at half-time, saying “Can I also come into your dressing-room?” linking this question to an attack on his integrity. Yet in the report, a witness is unsure whether the comment was aimed at Frisk or an assistant and cannot even be certain that Mourinho was venting allegations of collusion rather than just expressing irritation at the presence of an official in the Chelsea dressing-room, instructing his players to take the field.

There is frequent confusion over whether Rijkaard and Frisk spoke, with some witnesses saying that they did not, others insisting the official ordered the Barcelona coach to return to his dressing-room. As for the geography of the Nou Camp, which is being used to brand the noble Steve Clarke a liar, Uefa might be better served investigating why one of the two entrances to the home team's changing-room leads to the secure area where the referee resides and what Rijkaard was doing there at half-time. It might be impossible to see the entrance to the referee's room from where Clarke stood, as Gaillard has suggested, but the Chelsea assistant manager would have had a clear view of its vicinity.

In the tunnel at the Nou Camp, one team turn left, the other right. If we are being generous, Rijkaard merely took the scenic route home and ended up the wrong side of a glass partition. If we are being mischievous, the coach of Barcelona, a goal down at half-time, got lost in his own stadium and pitched up where the referee should be.

Clearly, even to speculate that this journey was not entirely accidental would be a grave attack on the integrity of football, akin to finding it a little disconcerting that the head of the Uefa disciplinary committee, Josep Lluís Vilaseca Guasch, is from Barcelona. Not that Uefa would confirm that yesterday. Having been fired by truth on Monday, yesterday it was the voice of vagueness that fielded questions about Guasch's home town.

“He's from Spain,” it said. “You would have to ask them.”

Eventually, a nice chap at the Tribunal Español de Arbitraje Deportivo (the Spanish Council of Sports Arbitration), where Guasch is president, confirmed: “He is based mainly in Barcelona.” Later, Guasch stood down from the Chelsea hearing, although by then the damage was done.

That is the problem with the truth, M Gaillard. Trumpet it once and we come to expect it. The latest speculation is that Guasch's allegiance to Barcelona stretches to being a *socio*, or member, of the club. Will he, or Uefa, clear up this matter in the name of truth? And if they will not, does this not undermine the integrity of Uefa more successfully than anything that Mourinho has attempted? Certainly, Guasch was present at the Nou Camp on the occasion of Chelsea's visit. Was he an impartial observer, or a supporter? In the context of Chelsea's day in court, this now matters.

The irony is that, having charged Mourinho for shooting from the lip, given the glimmer of an arc light, every grey suit at Uefa cannot resist grabbing his 15 minutes of fame, with disastrous results. Chelsea traditionally engage Jim Sturman, QC, on matters of sports law and unless Uefa intends establishing a Melchett-style kangaroo court —

in the case against Blackadder, the judge is called as the prosecution's first witness — he should have a fine time addressing Uefa's decision to mount the prosecution, hear the evidence and find the defendants guilty in absentia ten days before the hearing.

Expect Chelsea to issue a statement disputing the validity of Uefa's justice as a result of this outburst within the next 48 hours. If the governing body believes that it can hide behind the sympathy felt towards Frisk, who retired after receiving death threats from Chelsea fans, and bypass the basic principle of a fair trial without prejudgment, it is mistaken. Whatever your view of Mourinho's behaviour in Spain, Uefa's handling of the case contravenes a basic tenet of democracy and its dismal showing on issues from racial abuse to drugs in sport affords it no reserve of goodwill.

Who, for instance, said this and of what? "Uefa views this decision as a positive outcome, in line with our policy on such matters."

It was our old friend Gaillard again, responding to the pathetic fine of £420 imposed by the Spanish federation on Atlético Madrid for the racist chanting aimed at Roberto Carlos, the Real Madrid defender. Who left Real's match against Bayer Leverkusen in November without passing comment on the Nazi salutes and audible monkey chants directed at Roque Júnior, the defender, allowing the home club to issue a self-serving statement that Uefa had observed no trouble at their ground? None other than Lennart Johansson, the Uefa president.

Uefa's disciplinary department is a joke. Last season, Roy Keane, the Manchester United captain, was sent off for stamping on Vítor Baía, the FC Porto goalkeeper, in the first leg of a European Cup tie and Uefa appealed against its own statutory punishment (standard procedure, apparently) to have the ban extended. Then United were knocked out by Porto, at which point Uefa abandoned its appeal, allowing Keane to start afresh this season. Had United progressed, he would have been suspended; apparently his crime dissolved in defeat.

Using this logic, Chelsea and Mourinho were guilty of poisoning Uefa's fragrant atmosphere only when they went through to the quarterfinals. Had they been good little boys and been knocked out by the club with the big ground, the famous manager, the clandestine passageway to the referee's area and the head of Uefa's disciplinary department on the guest list, their problems might have faded away. That is justice, Uefa-style.

Melchett: "Anything to say before we kick off? Captain Darling?"

Darling (for the prosecution): "May it please the court, as this is clearly an open-and-shut case, I move to bring a private prosecution against the defence counsel for wasting the court's time."

Melchett: "Granted. Counsel is fined £50 for turning up. This is fun. This is just like a real court."

Much like the one Chelsea will face on March 31, apparently. Except this time with the jokes presiding, not in the script.

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