



Congressional voting scandal

New Zealand Soccer's annual "congress" in Auckland last month was arguably the worst in a litany of dodgy AGMs.

You probably hardly noticed, because in this supposed age of greater transparency, good governance and improved communication the event was conspicuous for its total lack of publicity.

Some might say, just as well, if you consider the following horror tale from the congress, which speaks volumes about the hypocrisy, bullshit and lack of democracy which is threatening to rule under the federation structure.....

At the congress there were two board vacancies to be filled.

With two candidates standing -- Noel Hadwen, the lowest-polling candidate from last time, and Aucklander Bruce White -- the mechanics looked straight forward.

But it was not to be.

Under the chairmanship of president Justice Warwick Gendall it was decided there had to be a vote, to see who might be lowest polling for the future and the two men were ushered out of the room.

Gendall asked for all those who wished to vote for Hadwen to raise their hands. Nobody did so. Amazing really, considering this was a sitting board member, but neither any of the federations or NZ Soccer itself, which also had a vote, wanted Hadwen.

Anyway, Gendall decided he would vote for him. (Under amended rules at the previous Wellington congress the president was awarded a deliberative vote as well as a casting vote.) When nobody voted against him, Hadwen was in -- surely the least popular sitting councillor ever.

But wait, there's more. Next up was White. After nobody voted for him also, Gendall asked if anybody wanted to vote AGAINST him. Federation 2 -- the Federation White is from, and the one which was sacked by its constituent clubs -- did so. Gendall ruled this meant he could not be appointed to the board because he lost the vote.

If anybody else involved with any organisation has ever heard of anything as diabolical as this being standard practice this side of the mafia, we'd like to know.

In our book if you have two vacancies and two candidates, you appoint them, then have a preferential ballot to see in what order they must seek re-election.

But NZS, with either the collusion or lack of spine from its federations, succeeded in keeping White, an experienced Auckland administrator, off the board.

So much for the new deal we were promised under the Stratful-MacGowan regime. Welcome to a world that stinks.

At this point it should be mentioned that the legality of the Fed 2 delegation was questionable seeing their clubs passed a near unanimous vote of no confidence in them shortly before the congress. However NZ Soccer ruled the unwanted delegates should still represent their federation.

Given that regional federations have a four-appointed, three-elected structure, the whole set-up is about as undemocratic as you can get. We have a cauldron bubbling away. The lid is barely staying on at the moment. However watch it blow off when the money runs out, as it surely will in a country where we could perhaps afford three

regional hierarchies with full-time employees, but never seven.

Incidentally, the favourite comment I heard back from delegates (who never want to be named, you understand) concerned coaching staffer Sandy Davie explaining to the congress how the new administration had come in and sorted out the mess from the old guard. As one delegate later said: "Bloody hell, Sandy was part of the old guard."

The latest from Auckland -- strange this stuff never ever gets a spin in the Herald - is that it is doubtful clubs are much better off for sacking their board. Two of the blokes they voted off -- Clive Herbert (father of Ricki) and Mark Mathews -- were re-appointed as "appointed members". Herbert, who was only deputy before, is now chairman.

It's all part of moves to have the game completely controlled by head office.

If I understand the position correctly, under new federation constitutions, all seven are now structured as branches of the national body.

Federation chairmen have signed the constitution off, pledging -- as they must under the Incorporated Societies Act -- that this move has the support of the majority of its members.

That's highly doubtful in Auckland's case at least.

Meanwhile there is gross dissatisfaction in Taranaki, which comes under the wing of Federation 4, which is based on the other side of the country in Napier.

Soccer Taranaki chairman Angus Livingstone is among those highly unimpressed by the federation concept...

"Taranaki thoroughly rejects the proposals being put forward to have this region governed from Napier, as the suggested headquarters for Federation Four, and for all money to be controlled by individuals based there." "There have been no contacts made with us and we have not been invited to make submissions." "We have been told, point blank, that if we don't toe the line, we'll face legal action from Soccer New Zealand. That's pretty heavy-handed." "I can understand why Napier is going along with it. They have... Napier City Rovers to look out for." "They have a lot to lose. They can't afford to be blacklisted out of the National League. But, as for Wanganui, Manawatu and Gisborne (the other Federation Four member associations), like us, they want nothing to do with it."

Acting manager of Federation four, by the way, is dumped NZS CEO Bob Patterson.

I'm enjoying Kingz matches at Ericsson this season, regardless of the weird way the team is being run by the Rufers.

It helps that the journey is about 45 minutes shorter for me personally, but there are more fundamental factors at work.

There is not the obsessively moronic emphasis on security at Ericsson. Sure, this means you get the odd car door on the pitch, but it also means you can walk around to the other side of the ground at halftime should you wish.

And unlike Albany, children are allowed to play on the grass banks while they watch. They look like they're enjoying themselves as well.

There are plenty of similarities with North Harbour Stadium, however. Beer (\$4 a plastic carton), food (chips \$3) and parking (\$5) are still overpriced, and I'm convinced if all the ancillary bits and pieces weren't such a rip-off sure you'd get more people.

But if there is a potential problem at Ericsson, it is the insistence on enforcing a price

differential between covered and uncovered seating.

Even if there was no difference in price, unless the weather was cats and dogs, almost everybody would choose to watch from the uncovered sections, because you are about three miles closer to the field.

And without the extra charge for covered seating, you could remove the wage bill for about 12 ushers/security people of the cost structure.

I raise this because I can predict the day when it pisses down with rain at a home match and there will be real grief.

Will they really make everyone sit out in the weather when the covered stand is 99 per cent empty?

The fact is there is more than enough covered seating for as many people as you are ever likely to get at a Kingz match. The Kingz following is not yet so vast that there is a need to demarcate between covered and uncovered seating.

I find it staggering that, again this season, Wynton Rufer swanned off to a soccer junket in Europe when the Kingz are in action. There he was nobbing it in Zurich with Bobby Charlton and Michel Platini when the Kingz were playing Newcastle.

Reality check: Wynton is the Kingz coach (well, in name, anyway) remember. I can't think of any other coach/manager of the professional club who would take such a cavalier attitude. But they seem happy for Wynton to be away at the Kingz. "Great to have a New Zealander on the Fifa players committee," Kingz manager Chris Turner wrote in The Royal Review on October 27.

If Turner really enjoys Rufer being absent from Ericsson... well, it begs the question doesn't it?

It was hard not to chuckle at the announcement that Ron Armstrong is to take over from Steve Cain as coach of Waitakere City. This is the same man that, remember, Waitakere absolutely savaged in their club programme last year at his preference for playing Over 35 soccer on Sundays rather than watch Waitakere prospects in his role at New Zealand U23 coach.

It was more withering than anything we've ever managed at Sitter! (see issue 37, August 1999). Absolutely disgusting, they spat. Well, perhaps the good people at Fred Taylor Park who are so keen to introduce Ron to the likes of Liam Mulrooney and Hamish Carmody have now figured out it is sometimes cheaper to buy a general than to fight his army. One sure way of getting your players considered for international duty is to hire the national coach concerned.

Incidentally, serial administrator and Westie soccer Godfather Rex Dawkins has returned to the fold at Waitakere as -- get this -- first team co-ordinator.

"It's a non-paying position," Rex hurriedly added.

Does that mean Ron has completely killed the budget?

"No, the days of big budgets are well and truly over -- at this level anyway," Dawkins said.

For those who are wondering what exactly a first team co-ordinator does, Rex is dead certain it's nothing to do with washing the socks or remembering to book the bus.

"My job is to make sure the club wins things," he said. Hmmm. In the old days, sure you paid more, but that's what *coaches* used to do.

So Tauranga City United — call them the new Mt Maunganui if you must — are in the national league, Nelson are out, and Caversham have been left wondering about issues of natural justice.

As for the rights and wrongs of who should be in the league, it's a bit like political economy. You can believe in "the free market" law of the jungle, whereby the most successful side (Caversham) fights its way to the top — despite the fact it's obvious to everyone such a solution will be wracked by problems. (If Wellington and Christchurch clubs are only moderately successful with one team, what chance Dunedin suffering with two?)

Or you can go with the "state interventionist model" under which a governing body has a hands-on role (to circumvent the law of the jungle) and steps in (to "pick a winner" by unnaturally elevating a club which didn't quite cut it in the playoffs) because it sees it as being the best way to nurture the code.

Then there are some, like Rex Dawkins, who belong to the reductionist school of thought. They would have preferred a 9-team league as a step towards it becoming an 8-team league. The argument here is you improve the standard by concentrating the product. (We could always reduce to a 2-team league — Auckland v The Rest — and have the ultimate.)

So whether New Zealand Soccer made the right decision on admitting Tauranga instead of Caversham depends where your philosophies lie, though there will be few fans who don't at least sympathise with Caversham's predicament. It's a tricky one.

We should acknowledge the drive and absolute passion of these clubs in leaving no stone unturned in their eager bids to enter a competition in which they will pay a \$35,000 entry fee to travel 1000km for matches played in front of 200-odd people on a good day.

Deep down they must know it simply does not make financial sense. For every punter who pays at the gate, the club is effectively subsidising him to the tune of about \$15 a head. But that's the national league for you. We can't afford it. And we can't afford to be without it. We can only wish Tauranga City United well.

If you hear anyone boning on about this being positive for the game in that all federations are now represented in the national league, recognise it as complete tosh.

Federation 3 (Force 3) doesn't exist in the psyche of Waikato supporters. They have little historic allegiance with Tauranga. It will not be "their" team. They will want their own team in there again one day too, smitten by the same bug that has infected everyone else.

Western Bay of Plenty is the fastest growing region in New Zealand, home of the Grey Power belt. Tauranga's inclusion is good for the game geographically — except Hamilton, where it could have a negative effect on development.

Incidentally, it could be a logistical nightmare getting to Links Ave for southern teams. Under Qantas sponsorship they'll be flying into Rotorua and bussing from there. Watch for overnight stays also. Still, Nelson was never that easy to get to. And it will be cheaper for the travel fund because the four Auckland teams will go by bus.

This has been the longest gap between issues I can recall since I took over as editor in April 1997. Apologies, but these things can't be helped. Sitter! is a hobby, not a full time job. I've served a longer stretch than my predecessor Boy Gorge. Maybe it's time to think about passing the baton on. -- **Bruce Holloway**