

STATEMENT BY WAYNE FORDE (MR.) – PRESIDENT, GUYANA FOOTBALL FEDERATION (GFF) MADE AT PRESS CONFERENCE TO DISCUSS THE GFF’S POSITION RELATIVE TO THE DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE’S PRONOUNCEMENT ON THE ELITE LEAGUE

PRESS CONFERENCE WAS HELD AT THE BOARDROOM, GFF SECRETARIAT ON 6TH MAY, 2017

Last year, the Executive Committee of the Guyana Football Federation took the historic and progressive decision, to expand the Elite League from eight to ten Clubs by adding two Clubs that are legitimate holders of Elite Club License. The Executive Committee’s decision is in full compliance with the powers conferred by the GFF Constitution according to Art. 36 par. 2 i.

The rationale for doing so was obvious, timely and widely supported: we had a responsibility to get more players and regions of Guyana involved in the top level of football as a matter of urgency, in order to accelerate the development of a sport which had been held back for too long.

Despite overwhelming national support for this move, four clubs opposed this decision, deliberately breaching the GFF Constitution by refusing to participate in this season’s Elite League, which they are Constitutionally mandated to do as members of the Guyana Football Federation according to Art. 13 1c. The clubs’ actions were unconstitutional, unprofessional, completely misguided, and against the interests of the overall development of football in Guyana and the players of each club.

The Disciplinary Committee, despite lacking the Constitutional authority, seized itself to adjudicate in this matter after the Clubs had lodged a complaint. On April 14th 2017, it ruled against the Executive Committee of the GFF.

The Executive Committee wishes to reiterate that the Disciplinary Committee had no Constitutional remit to deal with this matter. This position was confirmed by FIFA in its correspondence to the President of the GFF, dated May, 3rd, 2017. *Additionally, the Executive is of the firm conviction that the process engaged by the Disciplinary Committee was thoroughly flawed.*

The Executive Committee was elected on a platform of integrity and reform, and it is important to emphasise that we fully respect and vehemently defend the independence and role of football’s independent judicial bodies, as part of a credible, reformed governance structure. It is of vital importance that we have genuinely credible and independent judicial bodies composed of individuals who fully understand the remit of their Committees, but more importantly, respect the Statutes of FIFA, CONCACAF and the GFF.

We have stated clearly from the outset that this issue did not fall within the remit or competence of the Disciplinary Committee. The Executive Committee has received no response to this from the Chairman of the Disciplinary Committee, despite formally requesting that he prove on what authority he seized this matter.

As the Disciplinary Committee does not have the right to hear this matter, the Executive Committee did not take part in any proceedings, and we questioned the motivation and rationale behind such proceedings.

The correspondence from FIFA states:

“We take note that the Disciplinary Committee of the Guyana Football Federation apparently ruled upon the decision of the GFF Executive Committee to expand the number of clubs participating in the GFF Elite League from eight to ten despite the advice given by both CONCACAF and FIFA in their letters dated 8 November 2016 and 1 February 2017, respectively.”

To be clear, FIFA says the Disciplinary Committee has acted against the advice of the regional and global governing bodies of football.

The correspondence from FIFA continues:

“We deem that the decision taken by the GFF Disciplinary Committee exceeds its prerogatives.”

To be clear, FIFA states that the Disciplinary Committee has acted outside of its remit. This can only raise the question -- why did the Committee act in such a way?

Further, the FIFA letter states:

“We deem that the GFF Disciplinary Committee is only competent to pass decisions in relation to disciplinary issues. Consequently, the GFF Disciplinary Committee should not decide on matters related to decisions passed by the GFF Executive Committee.”

This leaves no room for doubt or discussion. The Disciplinary Committee has inexplicably acted outside of its remit, in an area that it has no jurisdiction. FIFA states that the Disciplinary Committee cannot rule on or attempt to change the democratic, transparent decisions of the Executive Committee.

The expansion of a football competition is not a disciplinary matter.

As such, any statement the Disciplinary Committee makes on such areas is null and void, and an abuse of its powers as an independent oversight body of football.

The correspondence from FIFA further states:

“The GFF Disciplinary Committee and Appeal Committee should operate based on a relevant set of regulations (i.e. a disciplinary code) which shall, inter alia, clearly define how disciplinary processes are to be conducted. Furthermore, such set of regulations shall ensure that judicial bodies are independent ... and it shall also establish that both committees are to be composed of different members.”

To recap:

1. FIFA confirms the position of the Executive Committee that the Disciplinary Committee acted outside of its remit in this matter, and that the committee should only rule on disciplinary issues.
2. FIFA confirms our position that the process was flawed.
3. FIFA confirms our position that the Disciplinary Committee should not rule on or seek to change a Constitutionally sound decision of the Executive Committee.

This regrettable episode has undermined the credibility of the independent oversight framework of football in Guyana. The independence and credibility of that framework must be protected as part of our efforts to reform football, and to take the game forward after years of stagnation and politically inspired infighting.

Looking forward, the Executive Committee has decided to take several urgent measures to strengthen this framework.

1. The GFF and FIFA are working together to develop the GFF disciplinary which will be presented to Congress in due course for approval. This will clearly spell out the role and remit of the independent judicial bodies, in line with FIFA and CONCACAF.
2. The Executive Committee has decided to take the matter concerning the Disciplinary Committee's statements to the GFF Congress on May 27. Congress is the highest decision-making body in football, and its decisions will be final.
3. We are also looking at further ways to strengthen the credibility, expertise and independence of the judicial oversight framework of football, in line with advice from FIFA and best governance practices from around the world.

FIFA has been unequivocal in its support for the actions and decisions of the GFF Executive Committee in reforming and developing football in Guyana. This has been made very clear during recent visits by the Presidents of FIFA and CONCACAF.

We are confident that Congress will also continue to support our decisions and actions as we work together to reform and develop football, and to move beyond the negative politics and vested interests of the past that have held football back for far too long.

Thank you,
Guyana Football Federation.