

SOCCER NEW ZEALAND –GOVERNANCE AND CHANGE IN SPORT - A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines a case study of a national governing body involved in the sport of soccer: Soccer New Zealand (SNZ). The case material attempts to overview the SNZ's internal and external environments, and pressures for change. The case provides opportunity to examine governance structures and processes, involving volunteers and professionals, their relationship and involvement in strategic and operational management. In illustration, the case documents issues arising from the development of a national competition, the introduction of invitation-only elite competitions, and the organisational determinants of turnover of key staff. The case suggests opportunity for the examination of longer term relationships between the governing body, its stakeholders, its national sports commission and international federation.

LAMONT'S LAMENT I

David Lamont, a Dunedin lawyer, and sometime council member of Soccer New Zealand (SNZ) was considering a whole series of issues as he contemplated the future that faced him as SNZ's newly elected Chairman. In October 1998, David, as Deputy Chairman for one year, had been encouraged to contest the election with the incumbent chairperson, Jock Irvine of Auckland, and so there were expectations that he could lead SNZ to a better future. There had been considerable change and turbulence during Jock's two years, and David had been close enough to know what, how and why things had happened, although not always close enough for the intimate involvement to ensure things being done to his satisfaction. David's decision to stand as Chairman was "to ensure that the reorganisation of soccer in New Zealand was concluded as quickly as possible" [1]. Lamont had said that: "The administration that currently exists is disjointed and needs to be united into one soccer family. Part of the restructuring will also bring in greater financial control which, quite frankly, has been absent in the past. Securing a strong financial base is critical for the future of soccer in New Zealand." Another main reason for taking on the chair was the upcoming 1999 Junior World Cup (JWC). "The tournament needs a rapid injection of effort in order to justify it being held in NZ; it will certainly help the profile of soccer in this country. That will be a new priority for our new council." Lamont was also aware that "NZ soccer was set to benefit from three significant financial boosts," particularly:

- \$1.00m spread over 4 years, for reaching the qualifying rounds of the 1998 World Cup Finals
- \$0.75m for qualifying for the 1999 Confederations Cup
- At least 1/12th of \$10m spread over 4 years - FIFA development funds to be distributed amongst 12 Oceania nations

SNZ is the steward of, and the controlling authority for soccer in New Zealand. It first came into being as the New Zealand Football Association (NZFA), became Soccer New Zealand in 1995 and changed to New Zealand Soccer (NZS) in 1998! The organisation has taken many forms, and during its evolution, it has been associated with many highs, lows, successes and failures, well-taken initiatives and lost opportunities, developing its own traditions and playing a considerable role in the development of the NZ immigrant culture [2]. Its recent efforts to promote and develop soccer nationwide have taken place at different levels. Initiatives have included the creation, in 1969, of a national soccer league (NSL) for elite clubs, the first for any sport in New Zealand, and then the innovation of a summer season for the NSL in 1996. At another level, the development and provision of coaching programmes for players and coaches has not only been fruitful, but has been much admired by other codes. SNZ has also sought to bring to NZ high profile events such as the FIFA Junior World Cup (JWC), and attempted to organise international matches against highly ranked teams. Its flagship team, known affectionately as the "All Whites" – a name gaining spin by complementary contrast with the successful NZ All Blacks rugby team - stirred the passion of all New Zealanders by qualifying for first time participation in the 1982 World Cup. To a lesser extent, the same excitement and pride was generated by the All Whites' qualification in 1998 for the 1999 FIFA Confederation Cup, which was to have provided the opportunity for them to play against other continental champions, such as Brazil, and against the World Champions, France. In qualifying for the final stages of both these tournaments, NZ had to overcome its closest rival, Australia, to become Oceania's representative.

"Win puts All Whites back on world stage" [3] *"All Whites book passage to Mexico"* [4]

However, despite the positives, it had become customary for any ill winds blowing through the game to excite critical comment from the press and soccer followers. For example, during the mid-nineties, much attention was given to a third successive failure to qualify for either the World Cup finals or the Olympic Games. Such criticisms have focused mainly on the organisation, rather than on individuals or personalities. Attention has been drawn to SNZ's governance and management structures; its politics; the effectiveness of its decision making; its administrative abilities, especially relating to aspects of public relations, sponsorship, finance and management of its flagship competitions [5], [6].

THE ISSUES

Soccer New Zealand as an organisation, was not oblivious to, or unaware of flaws in its systems or in its decision making. It had subjected itself to almost continual review during the decade. In 1995, reacting to some of these criticisms, and following a series of concept papers and reviews [7], [8], the NZFA entered into amalgamation with the

Soccer Women's Football Association of New Zealand (SWANZ), the New Zealand Soccer Referees Association (NZSRA), and the New Zealand Junior Football Association (NZJFA), to create a supra-body to be known as Soccer New Zealand (SNZ) to cover all aspects of football in NZ. However, the restructured organisation continued to experience episodes of misfortune, and of continuing criticism from within and without the sport. Damage to soccer's public image has been considered to be extensive, and has contributed to, and been accompanied by a succession of disenchanted individuals turning over in the general manager/chief executive's role, and in the role of national coach.

"Soccer's hope of making progress will depend on who runs the show" [9]

It had also been related to the way in which SNZ's constituent clubs who had lost confidence in the decision making process felt it necessary to challenge the governing body through the courts system or by overturning decisions and remits at AGMs. Indeed, SNZ may have suffered a considerable setback to their prospects of attracting a new sponsor when they found themselves taken to the High Court by one of its own clubs. The costly episode was entered into despite the SNZ CEO's assertion, after the event, that the outcome was not a surprise; and despite other clubs wanting the matter settled out of court. The judgement referred to a lack of due process being followed by SNZ, and stated:

"The litigation ... does nothing for the image, or the pocket, of the sport to have to engage in High Court litigation" [10].

David Lamont had plenty of things to think about over the next few days - several reports to consider; several important decisions to make about strategic and operational matters; several issues relating to restructuring and reconstituting SNZ itself, and of the restructuring of the national and major regional competitions. His views on these challenges were expressed in these comments - *"If we work together ... in five years or less you will not recognise the game in New Zealand as it will have developed tremendously"* [11]. Such optimism existed despite the need to secure a three year \$200k interest free loan from the Oceania Football Confederation to offset "chronic" cash flow problems that, compounded with unexpected expenditure, had produced a record \$468k deficit for the 1998 year on revenues of \$1.7m [12].

Changes in Senior Management & Chairmanship of SNZ

The recent history of SNZ's ability to marry the professional management arm with the traditional volunteer makeup of the governing body's Council is to some extent reflected in the rapid turnover of senior managers over the four year period from 1995 to 1999.

Year	Chairman	Gen Mgr - CEO	Coach	
1994	Harry Dods	Noel Robinson (Sec)	Bobby Clark	4/94
1995		Bill MacGowan 5/95	Keith Pritchett	2/95
1996	Jock Irvine	John Morton 7/96		
1997		Bob Patterson 2/97	Joe McGrath	2/97
1998	David Lamont		Ken Dugdale	5/98
1999	Kevin Stratful	Bill MacGowan 2/00		

Bill MacGowan, former Managing Director of P & O Ltd, and well respected within the game of soccer, was appointed in March 1995, with great expectancy, as the first full-time CEO of the newly named SNZ. His resignation in frustration in May 1996 was interpreted as yet another indication of a dysfunctional relationship between senior management, Council and the Provincial Associations.

"I only went to one AGM but I virtually saw my whole year's work voted out. From a chief executive's point of view that was untenable" [13]. *"I was told that ... the Council had the ultimate power. That has not proved to be the case. Through the review process under which I was employed, I was told the Council had the mandate to run the game. That too, was wrong. At this year's Annual Meeting some pretty important remits were overturned by the Associations - often voting against the wishes of the Clubs who had put the Association members in place. I had one Association chairman telling me he had no need to consult his Clubs over such a matter"* [14]. *"The pettiness, self-interest and personal agendas in the game are unbelievable"* [15]

MacGowan's views echoed those of former All White, Sam Malcolmson, who had stated earlier in the year, prior to MacGowan's appointment and following the March 95 AGM, that *"association members have the power to overturn any deal made by the SNZ Council, which could make it very difficult for CEO Bill MacGowan"* [16]. MacGowan stated that SNZ had been locked into 10-year contracts with apparel and equipment suppliers like Mitre, and it had become dependent on the goodwill of large creditors in the travel sector, such as Air New Zealand and Stars Travel. Yet whenever Council took what it thought were corrective or appropriate decisions in the interest of the game at large, it was *'walloped by the associations'*, who wanted decisions or directions changed in their interest. Of course, such behaviour had not gone unnoticed by others *"watching from the outside"*, who had *"understandably shied away"* from making a contribution [14]

MacGowan's successor, 'successful business man' John Morton was appointed early in July 8th 1996, but 'dismissed' in February 1998. Morton was seen as a soccer lover - a keen local amateur soccer player - with the entrepreneurial flair to inject life into the business of soccer. Whilst he had built two successful business careers, he had been unemployed/resting for two years following a lucrative period as a real estate salesman, having made \$650m commercial sales in the early nineties. Described as a self-styled publishing impresario, he had helped set up two of New Zealand's most successful current affairs/lifestyle magazines, *Metro* and *North and South*. But he found that running his own business was different to running someone else's. Neither Morton or the SNZ lived up into each other's expectations. Morton's reaction was *"In other jobs, I've been the boss. In this one, I'm not"* [17]. However, from the perspective of the SNZ Council, it was his failure to secure sponsorship funds and a general unease with his management style that led to

its disenchantment and his eventual demise during his second year, following a period of extended leave. Morton later negotiated an out-of-court settlement “reputedly worth \$300k” adding to the loss of \$140k on the NSL!! [18]

Bob Patterson, another respected soccer man was appointed to the newly designated General Manager’ job, almost immediately afterwards in February 1998. He had just completed a management audit for the Council of SNZ, recommending the development of a comprehensive strategic plan; the reorganisation of management and support structures; changes to management style; the upskilling of administrative positions and a required sense of urgency to capitalise on the marketing opportunities of the 1999 FIFA JWC to be held in NZ. He had earlier quit employment at the Department of Labour after 17 years to join SNZ on contract to organise the 1999 JWC [19]. He had been completing the management audit as an additional exercise, and had impressed councillors with his knowledge and understanding! Having said “*Judge me in 18 to 24 months time. I’m comfortable in my own ability*” [20], he resigned within two years in February 2000. His departure provided opportunity for the welcoming back of Bill MacGowan, reappointed following a stint as CEO of the Auckland Warriors Rugby League team. MacGowan had replaced Patterson as organiser of the JWC in February 1999 as his GM’s duties grew. Now he was replacing him as head man – with some confidence: “*Everything has changed since I was last in the office. This (Federation structure) is what I wanted and couldn’t get implemented*” [20].

1999 FIFA Junior World Cup (JWC)

The story behind NZ losing and regaining the right to host the 1999 FIFA JWC is not fully known, but interesting and subject to differing interpretations. The event was first allocated to NZ in 1997, but FIFA withdrew its invitation in March 1998 with the supposed compliance of SNZ representatives. Hillary Commission Chief Executive, Peter Dale, had accompanied CEO Bob Patterson to Geneva for a FIFA Meeting in March 1998 to report on progress. Dale had always been more realistic about the impact and ramifications of hosting the JWC, or so he felt, than many in the soccer community (NZPA, 1998) [21]. His realism about SNZ and NZ’s capability was interpreted by some to be responsible for FIFA forming a view that the coincidental timing of the America’s Cup in Auckland and the Women’s Netball World Cup in Christchurch would detract from NZ’s capacity to attract spectators and sponsors. Patterson commented, “*We had to be honest and tell them the support was not going to be there at that time of the year*” [22]. Dale had later said to the SNZ Annual Meeting that SNZ had withdrawn from hosting the 1999 championships in order to gain FIFA support for the future, to avoid a potential \$2m loss on the tournament [23], and also to avoid losing a vote on the matter that was going to be forced by Trinidad and Tobago [24]. The decision by FIFA and the actions of the SNZ delegates left SNZ Chairman, Jock Irvine feeling disappointed, angry and helpless. He had been unaware of the likely path and seriousness of such developments, and wanted explanations for what had happened [25], for himself, as Chairman and as media spokesperson for SNZ. Any embarrassment over his ability to shape proceedings or even possible feelings of inadequacy that he may have felt over the matter, were assumed to be valid reasons for the lack of information provided to the press: Nevertheless, the reaction from the press and public to what seemed another humiliation for SNZ was typical:

“Boss goes bush after soccer’s cup shambles” [26]

“Soccer in New Zealand on the road to nowhere” [27]

However, it transpired that there had also been some lobbying by European countries who felt that they would have been disadvantaged by the February dates - which objections disappeared when FIFA switched to October/November dates [28]. By July 1998, SNZ had evaluated the impact of hosting on the new dates and were engaged in “*actively seeking reinstatement of the tournament*” [29]. Their lobbying bore fruit when FIFA reinstated SNZ as organisers of the November 1999 tournament. SNZ protected itself from financial risk in running the tournament by setting up a new legal entity divorced from itself [30]. However, SNZ’s problems were far from over. For as the role of organiser passed from Bob Patterson to Bill MacGowan in February 1999, former All White and SNZ councillor, Chris Turner, was ready to take the SNZ to court, claiming that he had already been “*given the right to run the world tournament*” [31]. *Indeed, it had been claimed that SNZ councillors had been told that Chris Turner had been “handed the reins”* [32]. If so, little progress had been made during his reign. MacGowan, meanwhile, had been part of an ad-hoc group “put together” by Hillary Commission CEO Peter Dale, to offer advice on tournament organisation. However, by Xmas 1998, with only ten months to the start of the JWC, it appeared that little action had been taken by SNZ with respect to group’s advice! Furthermore, Dale had wanted MacGowan involved in the tournament organisation. He had also affirmed that the Hillary Commission would contribute \$100k to the “organisational costs” when it “*was convinced that the tournament will go ahead*”.

Nature of decisions about participation in SNZ Leagues - the National Soccer League (NSL), the NI League

Soccer was the first NZ sport to create a national club competition – the NSL. In its various forms, it has always spawned comment, debate and/or criticism. The intent of SNZ (and its predecessor, NZFA) has always been to use the competition to promote and develop the game, to increase interest and participation, and to improve the quality of play at the highest levels. The decision to switch the NSL to summer season starting January 1995 was made with such aims. However, operational issues that were unforeseen, disregarded or deliberately understated, have often had major impact. For example, summer NSL clubs, needed to operate ‘all year round’ – creating pressures and dilemmas for players, volunteers and spectators. Players were dissuaded from playing in both summer national and winter regional leagues,

and clubs were, at one time, not allowed to play more than three NSL players in their premier winter league teams. The consequences included divided loyalties experienced by players; clubs having to field weakened teams in the traditional winter competitions; diminished player and spectator interest and often embarrassing results for weakened NSL clubs. Several clubs have not been able to sustain the costs of competing in the NSL, despite the support from sponsors. However, during its first ten years, Auckland City was the only club to withdraw from the league claiming financial difficulties [5]. In recent years, Wellington United (1997) and Dunedin Technical have relinquished their places, with United indicating that the *"the winter side of the club, where the majority are involved, must take priority"*, confirming that their *"decision wasn't based purely on money"* [33]. Some clubs have merged or formed partnerships in order to maintain a national profile others to gain entry to the NSL. Some have folded under financial pressure, whilst others have set aside aspirations to play at the national level. Yet, new clubs have emerged seeking entry to the NSL, full of ambition, enthusiasm, and often with considerable following and financial support. Amongst the contenders for entry to the NSL in late 1998 were clubs such as Central United, Melville United, Western Suburbs, Lower Hutt City, clubs which were not in existence or in their current form when the NSL first emerged. Such clubs were created to be able to concentrate player resources, to gain advantages of scale in playing numbers and membership, and to improve financial viability. The downside to non-participation in the NSL has been that clubs have not always been able to retain their quality players, or their national representatives, with a consequent impact on their ability to recruit talented younger players, thus creating a downward spiral in performances and fortunes. Even worse for the clubs has been the effect of under-supply or over-demand for "so called quality" players. By late 1998, player payments had become the norm - in an otherwise amateur game. This was even though clubs were continually stretched for resources, and even though spectator attendances and gate-money had not risen since an earlier time when it had been concluded that they were considered insufficient to cover the payments (SNZ Review, 1994). It had been claimed that whilst travel costs had not broken any club 'as yet', player payments were more likely to be responsible for clubs getting into financial difficulty.

History of the National Soccer League

1969	Rothman's NS League	- Year 1
1975?	Winfield League	
1987	League Suspended	
1992/4	Winfield Regional Superclub League	
1995	SmokeFree Regional Superclub	
1996	SmokeFree Summer NSL - Year 1	
1996/7	SmokeFree Summer NSL - Year 2	
1997/8	SmokeFree Summer NSL - Year 3, No sponsor	
1998/9	South Pacific Cup	- Franchise competition, postponed
1999	Summer NSL Regional Summer Leagues- Year 1	- Suspended, No sponsor
2000	National Club Ch'ship	- Major Sponsor - Ansett; + Adidas

Some provincial teams, like Nelson Suburbs and Napier City Rovers, were already de facto super clubs in their respective cities and regions. Their emergence was necessary to concentrate resources and effort to provide opportunities for local people to play soccer at the highest level without leaving the region. Nevertheless, both clubs have needed to recruit players from elsewhere in order to compete successfully in the NSL. For these clubs and their followers, participation in the NSL provides them with the flagship that can be used to promote and develop the game at the provincial level. It is not surprising then to understand the reaction of Nelson when they learned that they had not been selected to participate in the 1997/98 summer NSL.

SNZ, in an attempt to upgrade its NSL summer competition, introduced stringent criteria relating to a club's playing strength, ground and spectator facilities, and financial strength. Following two years of successful participation, Soccer Nelson was informed in October 1997 that its club, Nelson Suburbs, would not be invited to rejoin the NSL. Soccer Nelson sought an injunction requiring SNZ to allow their club's continuing participation in the 97/98 NSL, citing failure of SNZ to adhere to contractual obligations and to invoke dispute resolution procedures. The court's judgement was in Soccer Nelson's favour; it resulted in the NSL being extended to eleven teams, and Nelson being awarded \$4k costs. One year later, the frustrated aspirations of another team led to threats of court action. Western Suburbs, based in Porirua City, north of Wellington, had narrowly missed out on a place in the 1997 summer NSL. A reformatted national competition under the guise of the South Pacific Cup (SPC) had been proposed for summer 1998/99, but had been abandoned given the lack of sponsorship support. At that point, Western Suburbs found themselves in a position where they were likely to be excluded from what was effectively a subsidiary replacement competition, the new winter regional North Island League (NIL). They claimed that not only had they already been **invited to join** the NIL, but that they had been informed *"off the record"* before the public release of the decision that they had outranked one club which was later announced as selected [34]. SNZ Deputy Chairman, Rex Dawkins, who had led the selection panel, said, when quizzed about the views of the disaffected clubs, that he couldn't foresee the competition being extended to meet their needs. Western Suburbs threatened to proceed with court action. Two days later, Dawkins stated that the decision had been reviewed, and that the League was to be increased to twelve teams! Whether or not SNZ felt threatened by the possibility of legal action, they conceded that Western Suburbs had a case and changed their decision - so prior limits on, first eight, then ten teams were removed. The rationale for limits being undermined, SNZ decided to bring a twelfth team.

Manawatu into the NIL!! Dawkins promised an investigation into the selection process would be conducted by SNZ Men's Committee, and he effectively admitted that there had been a mistake in the original selection [35].

"*Soccer NZ does about-turn*" [36].

By February 1999, Lamont had gone, along with his Deputy, and four other councillors, "*dumped in a vote by associations*" at the February AGM. [37]. In April, he was replaced as chair by former critic and new Board member, Kevin Stratful, who led another review of NZS. Stratful's group engaged in an extensive consultative process, and aided by staff of the Hillary Commission, unveiled its final report in July 1999 (Appendix 1). Stratful's visions for soccer had taken him into the fray. The challenge lay ahead! How should he tackle it? What lessons should he take from Lamont's lament?

APPENDIX 1

REVIEWS & REPORTS

1992 - "Heylen Survey of Clubs"

1992 - "Re-organisation of the NZFA", Noel Robinson, Council Member,

1994 - "A proposed New Structure for Soccer New Zealand" NZFA Organisation Review Committee, March 1994

1994 - "KPMG report to the Hillary Commission", May 1994

1995 - "Soccer New Zealand - Strategic Plan - October 1995 - November 1998", June 95

1999 - "Soccer Federations: the Way Forward" - SNZ, July 1999

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