



By George Stavroulakis

Football Federation Australia are edging towards a first ever female chair with FIFA insider Judith Griggs among the favourites to succeed Steven Lowy in the top job.



The former CEO of the Australian Grand Prix Corporation was the FIFA-appointed head of the Congress Review Working Group which successfully drove governance change. And now the Adelaide-raised, London-based lawyer and sports rights and management specialist is being touted by several highly-placed Congress sources as heavily in the frame to top the ballot when a new board selects their leader at November 19's AGM.

Four new board members, including the chair, will be elected that day.

Of the five chair contenders, existing director Chris Nikou and top-end-of-town accountant and GWS Giants deputy chairman Joseph Carrozzi are also leading contenders in what will be a secret ballot.

Former Socceroo Craig Foster and ex-Football Federation Victoria CEO Mark Rendell have also nominated for the role, should they be elected by the newly formed 29-strong Congress as new directors.

Board candidates will need to garner 60 per cent or more of the vote, with the A-League clubs (28 per cent) and the state federations (55 per cent) the two most powerful blocks.

"Judith Griggs, during the CRWG process, got a good grasp of the issues and is somebody with no allegiances to anybody and who knows the big picture," a Congress insider said.

"FIFA know her and clearly have confidence in her and she's somebody capable of building a level of consensus.

"The clubs, in general, believe she's a person of stature

and she has a lot of support there.

"With the state federations you never know for sure. They remain the great unknown and are really accountable to no-one."

While the federations remain as unpredictable as they are capricious, the fact that Griggs was able to cajole them into a cohesive enough block to seal the downfall of an intransigent Lowy is testament to her powers of persuasion.

"She ticks pretty much all the boxes among the existing candidates for the board and also as a chair," the source added.

"She's a straight talker who doesn't gloss over issues and adopts a consultative approach. During the CRWG process she managed a lot of egos, and they were all male.

"She doesn't have preconceived ideas, is very open and easy to communicate with. She doesn't shoot from the hip and she does her research."

Melbourne-based lawyer and former Victory board member Nikou has his supporters but is somewhat tainted by his association with the status quo and being part of a Lowy regime which sought to block reform at every turn.

However the Asian Cup 2015 organising committee member is seen by some as a conciliator and a strong "compromise" option.

Accounting and Advisory firm PwC managing partner Carrozzi, also on the 2015 Asian Cup organising committee, has vast experience on boards, committees and advisory panels and is currently chairman of the Sydney Harbour

Federation Trust.

But his association with a rival code, through the GWS Giants, may be viewed as a negative with the football fraternity weary and wary of any more executives from rival codes being brought in to run the show.

Griggs has 25 years of experience in motorsport, having worked for Bernie Ecclestone at the Formula One headquarters in London for five years prior to being appointed CEO of the Australian Grand Prix Corporation when the race was switched to Melbourne.

She returned to UK to work for Allsports Management, the company responsible for most of F1's commercial interests.

She currently runs London-based consultancy Sports Rights Management, which she founded in 2014, and sits on the board of Tourism South Australia.

Whilst there is momentum behind Griggs there are also those who believe she presided over limited reforms which have fallen well short of major democratisation.

One of the great incongruities of the looming election is the fact that current directors Kelly Bayer Rosmarin and Crispin Murray, both staunch Lowy allies and complicit in seeking to thwart a broadening of the Congress over the past three years, have opted to see out their terms.

The Association of Australian Football Clubs (AAFC) will host a Q&A-style Community Forum in Melbourne next Monday at which several of the 12 would-be new board members will be speaking..

Papas thrilled with life in Indian football hotbed

With a fanatical fanbase, X-factor imports and a Bollywood star owner, Aussie coach Arthur Papas is loving life with the improving Indian Super League side NorthEast United.

The club, which represents eight states, is an anomaly in the cricket-loving nation, according to Papas. **"I know** cricket is still the number one sport in most of India, but it's not in the northeast of the country," the former AIS, A-League assistant, and Victorian NPL coach told ftbl.com.au from India.

"They are fanatical about their football. And this year we've managed to get the state behind us," said Papas, United's assistant coach.

"It's a very difficult job here in the north east of India. They are the only club never to qualify for ISL playoffs.

"But it's gone well so far, we amassed the same points after five games than we did in 18 last season.

"And we've got some really good foreigners. We have a Uruguayan playmaker Federico Gallego and a Nigerian striker called Bart Ogbeche.

These two guys right now are the form players in the league.

"The squad is a really good mix of young Indian players and foreign players."

Crowds of 15-20,000 at the Indira Gandhi Stadium are proof the locals are finally getting excited about the Highlanders after a lean five years in the ISL.

With just one loss in their last five, United's next game after the international break is November 23 against Kerala Blasters at the Indira Gandhi.

Sitting in fifth, a win could potentially propel United into second in the 10-team competition.

One of the owners of the club is John Abraham [the actor and former model]. He's a huge star in India but also provides grounded leadership for a club desperate to make the

playoffs.

"He's a fantastic person, down to earth and humble even though he's a star, with people always trying to get his autograph. He's such a gentleman," said Papas.

"We're looked after extremely well here. The pitches are very good, the training is good and we're looked after off the pitch."

With head coach Dutchman Eelco Schattorie and fellow Aussie assistant coach Shaun Ontong, a former A-League player, Papas is relishing another opportunity to work with both coaches on foreign soil.

With the AFC-experienced Schattorie, Papas helped Saudi Pro League side Al-Ettifaq avoid relegation last year.

"It's about evolving as a coach and working with people you enjoy working with. I have a great working relationship with Eelco [Schattorie]



and have a similar coaching philosophy.

"And Shaun is one of the brightest young coaches from Australia coming through," added Papas, who also consults for clubs in Japan.

The ISL is giving Papas vital experience given the dearth of professional opportunities in Australia.

It's the first time Papas has been back in India in three years. He made his name on the sub-continent as coach of the national U23 side after coaching at the AIS, NPL and A-League as an assistant coach at Heart and the Jets.

And now he's seeing many of the players he coached now debuting in the five-year-old ISL.

"This ISL has improved a lot from when I was first here. The foreign players are a lot better now. It's not just about marquee anymore. It's a longer league too, going now for eight months."

The Australian presence is growing in the ISL with NorthEast's Aussie coaches, plus Tim Cahill, Erik Paartalu on the pitch and even legendary Aussie commentator Andy Paschalidis calling games shown in Australia.

Papas added: "Having Timmy [Cahill] here, the Indian players really look up to him. He's adapted well to this league. But that's expected.

"He's done that everywhere he's gone, hasn't he?"