



By George Stavroulakis

SIMON HILL EXPLAINS THE UPCOMING FFA ELECTION AND WHY ITS SO IMPORTANT TO THE GAME IN AUSTRALIA

“Vote all but ends Australian soccer’s (sic) political war” - that was the headline in the Sydney Morning Herald on October 2.

For most, the interminable battle (primarily a stoush between A-League clubs and the FFA board, and in particular, it’s now ousted Chairman, Steven Lowy) ended when the congress voted to usher in a new period of more representative governance.

Perhaps that’s why there has been scant public commentary on the upcoming board elections?

Many are tired of the politics - but while that is a perfectly understandable sentiment, the ceasing of hostilities in the three-year war will mean little, if the ensuing peace is unsatisfactory.

This is where football as a sport still suffers. The lack of space afforded to the game in the mainstream media, the lack - in sheer numbers - of football writers and broadcasters in paid employment, and (in some cases), the pressure applied to those that are, all adds up to a game still on the margins. Thus, its major decisions are taken under the cloak of secrecy.

Contrast that, with the current airing of the issues affecting cricket.

There, the debate is plentiful, robust, and crucially, conducted in the full glare of public scrutiny.

Yet in just under a weeks time, the new FFA Congress will take its most important decisions in a generation, when it elects four new members to a new-look board to take the game forward.

In all, there are eleven candidates - Morry Bailes, Joseph Carrozzi, Stephen Conroy, Craig Foster, Danny Moulis, Chris Nikou, Remo Nogarotto, Linda Norquay, Heather Reid, Mark Rendell and Mark Shield. Two existing board members, Kelly Bayer Rosmarin and Crispin Murray, will stay on to complete their terms. Judith Griggs withdrew last Friday.

So, as the game heads towards this brave new world, it is incumbent upon the football community to know who is about to represent them - and more importantly, exactly what they will bring to the table.

Which is why it was refreshing to see seven of the eleven commit to attending a “Town Hall” type forum in Melbourne on Monday night. In addition, two more - Bailes and Reid - provided statements, although they didn’t attend in person.

The debate was broadcast live on Football Nation Radio, and on the AAFC Facebook page.

The forum (which, for disclosure purposes I moderated, without payment), was the brainchild of the Australian Association of Football Clubs, and was designed to drag into the open the one thing that has been denied us for too long - public debate of the key issues, along with scrutiny of those charged with making the decisions that affect the game.

All the nominees spoke articulately and passionately. There was vigorous debate and a whole range of views espoused.



Steven Lowy's reign as FFA Chairman is

Craig Foster is a leading candidate

All are to be commended for putting themselves “out there,” in the true spirit of democracy, transparency and accountability.

The danger with these things of course, is that it can descend into a popularity contest, and while on the night there was no doubt Craig Foster’s oratory skills and passionately argued vision earned him the most plaudits, that alone should not necessarily be his keys to the castle. Nor should the non-attendance of other nominees be seen as a reason not to vote for them either.

Constructing a board is a complex process, a delicate balance of matching skills, knowledge, experience, independence and diversity. Not least because football in particular faces a whole range of issues - some unique - for which there are few easy solutions.

The whole idea of the exercise was to start a discussion, and to inform at least in part, the people who really matter - the many thousands who make up the football community, and who have the biggest vested interest in the outcome.

So, with the nominees having done their bit, it is now up to the games parliament to step up to the plate.

The State Federations, the A-League clubs, the PFA and the newly-inaugurated Women’s Council have - between them - the 100 votes that will decide upon the make-up of the board. The clubs, PFA, and some states have all been very vocal over the last few years regarding the need for transparency and accountability.

Now they must prove they practice what they preach.

Next week, each vote needs to be publicly declared, along with the reasons why a particular candidate has been selected - and crucially, how. This decision-making “matrix” was one used by Football New South Wales in explaining how they’d arrived at their standpoint on the original

congress issues.

It should be mandatory for all future votes.

If we are to create a healthier, more successful game, then the public conversation (provided we play the issues, not the personalities), must be strengthened, not stymied. Transparency & accountability.

Because without it, it won’t be long before we are having the same rows regarding governance all over again.

