

Is the FIFA World cup qualification a fair game?

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FIFA has 208 member football associations from around the world all clamouring to qualify for each World Cup tournament and reap the massive \$8 million appearance fee as well as further windfalls and lucrative merchandising revenues. With fierce competition for qualification, is FIFA allocating the 32 places fairly or are processes

biased by finances and politics? New research, published in the journal *Soccer & Society*, suggests that a more transparent allocation processes is urgently required. Without this, experts at Canada's Sprott School of Business argue, FIFA will be open to the accusation it is more concerned with financial gain from the World Cup than showcasing the very best football.

The allocation of World Cup qualification spots is dictated by FIFA between six confederations of member countries. Each confederation has a set number of places according to how 'strong' they are and their level of performance in the previous 4 years. 2010 saw \$40 million paid to 400 clubs from 55 FIFA Member countries. The lion's share of revenue goes to a small proportion of FIFA members, primarily top European clubs. The CONMEBOL and UEFA regions, less than 20% of total FIFA membership (but including Brazil, Argentina, Italy, Spain, Germany, France, England and the Netherlands) holds more than half the qualifying spots. Is the World Cup a self-fuelling competition for the elite?

In their new article, "Unfair play in World Cup qualification? An analysis of the 1998–2010 FIFA World Cup performances and the bias in the allocation of tournament berths", Christian Stone and Michel Rod studied the match results for 1st round tournament matches 1998-2010 to assess the adequacy of the qualification process. This demonstrated that the current system of qualification is not based on ensuring the qualification of the best 32 teams in the world, nor does it fairly allocate qualification spots on the number of teams per federation or any other metric. Such findings suggest things could be done differently and identify the need for a more dynamic system with fewer fixed spots and more opportunity for inter-confederation play, giving those at the top of their game the opportunity to shine and for a truer representation of the best during the World Cup.

The World Cup generates 90% of FIFA revenues. Stone and Rod believe that this economic success should be used by FIFA, in the cause of corporate social responsibility, to expand participation. Without that, the question is asked "has world football become the means to an end in terms of money as the ultimate objective?"

More information: Christian Stone & Michel Rod. "Unfair play in World Cup qualification? An analysis of the 1998–2010 FIFA World Cup performances and the bias in the allocation of tournament berths." *Soccer & Society*, Published online: 17 Mar 2014. [DOI: 10.1080/14660970.2014.891985](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2014.891985)

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