

Morning Mix

How a curmudgeonly old reporter exposed the FIFA scandal that toppled Sepp Blatter

By Michael E. Miller June 3 at 5:03 AM

The biggest news story of the year was breaking, but the journalist responsible was fast asleep.

It was just after dawn on May 27 when Andrew Jennings's phone began ringing. Swiss police had just launched a startling raid on a luxury hotel in Zurich, arresting seven top FIFA officials and charging them and others with running a \$150 million racket. The world was stunned.

The waking world, that is. If Jennings had bothered to climb out of bed, he wouldn't have been surprised at the news. After all, he was the man who set the investigation in motion, with a book in 2006, [“FOUL! The Secret World of FIFA: Bribes, Vote Rigging and Ticket Scandals,”](#) followed by an exposé aired on the BBC's “Panorama” program that same year, and then another book in 2014, called [“Omerta: Sepp Blatter's FIFA Organised Crime Family.”](#)

“My phone started ringing at six in the morning,” Jennings said Tuesday from his farm in the hilly north of England. “I turned it off actually to get some more sleep, because whatever is happening at six in the morning is still going to be there at lunch time, isn't it?”

If you can't tell already, Jennings is an advocate of slow, methodical journalism. For half a century, the 71-year-old investigative reporter has been digging into complex, time-consuming stories about organized crime. In the 1980s, it was bad cops, the Thai heroin trade and the Italian mob. In the '90s, he turned to sports, exposing corruption with the International Olympic Committee.

For the past 15 years, Jennings has focused on the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), international soccer's governing body. As other journalists were ball watching — reporting scorelines or writing player profiles — Jennings was digging into the dirty deals underpinning the world's most popular game.

“Credit in this saga should go to the dogged obsession of a single reporter, Andrew Jennings,” the Guardian's [Simon Jenkins wrote last week](#), citing in particular Jennings's BBC “Panorama” film called [“The Beautiful Bung: Corruption and the World Cup.”](#)

Now, after decades of threats, suspicions about tapped phones and intermittent paychecks, Jennings is being vindicated with every twist and turn in the FIFA scandal.

[\[Interpol issues 'red notices' for 6 people tied to the scandal: Who they are and what that means\]](#)

During a phone interview Tuesday morning with The Washington Post, he called FIFA President Sepp Blatter “a dead man walking.” Two hours later, Blatter announced he was stepping down, just days after being reelected.

“I know that they are criminal scum, and I’ve known it for years,” he said. “And that is a thoughtful summation. That is not an insult. That is not throwing about wild words.”

“These scum have stolen the people’s sport. They’ve stolen it, the cynical thieving bastards,” he said. “So, yes, it’s nice to see the fear on their faces.”

A ‘document hound’

The best way for Americans to imagine Andrew Jennings is to roll Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein together, then add a touch of a Scottish burr and plenty of flannel. Jennings was born in Scotland but moved to London as a child. His grandfather played for a prominent London soccer team, Clapton Orient (now called Leyton Orient), but Jennings had little interest in the sport. He did, however, have a nose for journalism.

After finishing school, Jennings joined the Sunday Times in London, where he got a taste of investigative journalism. He went to work for the BBC, but when the network wouldn’t air his documentary on corruption within Scotland Yard, he quit and joined a rival program called “World in Action.” He turned his police investigation into his first book, “[Scotland Yard’s Cocaine Connection](#),” and a documentary.

“I’m a document hound. If I’ve got your documents, I know all about you,” he said. “This journalism business is easy, you know. You just find some disgraceful, disgustingly corrupt people and you work on it! You have to. That’s what we do. The rest of the media gets far too cozy with them. It’s wrong. Your mother told you what was wrong. You know what’s wrong. Our job is to investigate, acquire evidence.”

That is, essentially, Jennings’s mantra: Take time, dig up dirt and don’t trust those in power. He applied the same logic to international drug smuggling rings and Italian mafiosi.

Then sports. After the Scotland Yard exposé, a colleague at “World In Action” named Paul Greengrass — who later became a Hollywood filmmaker, directing several Jason Bourne films as well as the recent blockbuster “[Captain Phillips](#)” — suggested investigating the IOC.