

To the associations of FIFA

Circular no. 901

Zurich, 19 March 2004
GS/htä-hus

Eligibility to play for national teams

Dear Sir or Madam,

FIFA has learnt from various sources that a number of Brazilian players currently playing in the German Bundesliga apparently intended to assume a new nationality – in particular that of Qatar – in order to be eligible to play for the respective Association. This led the FIFA President to ask the FIFA Emergency Committee to examine the facts of the matter.

The first sentence of article 15 par. 1 of the Regulations Governing the Application of the Statutes stipulates that any person holding the nationality of a country is eligible to play for that country's national team. From a strictly legal point of view, this means that if a player has never played for a national team, he may assume another nationality and play for the national team of the new country, irrespective of his age.

However, this basic provision does not expressly provide for players being able to play, without any impediment, for another national team for no obvious reason. If a player changes his nationality or if he accepts another nationality simply in order to be able to play for the new national team, he is clearly breaching article 2(e) of the FIFA Statutes, unless he meets one of the following conditions:

- a) the player was born on the territory of the relevant Association;
- b) his biological mother or biological father was born on the territory of the relevant Association;
- c) his grandmother or grandfather was born on the territory of the relevant Association;
- d) he has lived continuously for at least two years on the territory of the relevant Association.

The above conditions ensure that a player has a clear connection with the relevant country, and as a result, to the Association in question. On 4 December 2003, the FIFA Executive Committee approved the above conditions in the special regulations governing eligibility to play for national teams (players theoretically eligible to play for several

national teams on account of their nationality). As these cases are similar from a factual point of view, these conditions should also apply to the matter at hand.

By stipulating that a player must fulfil one of the above conditions, such practices, which are not in accordance with the aim and object of the FIFA Statutes, can be prevented.

As this situation is not expressly provided for in article 15, par. 1 of the Regulations Governing the Application of the Statutes, the Executive Committee had to reach a decision in this regard (cf. article 78 of the FIFA Statutes). However, as we had reason to believe that some players were looking to exploit the fact that this situation had not been expressly provided for, we needed to clarify article 15, paragraph 1 of the Regulations Governing the Application of the Statutes as soon as possible, as it was never the intention of the FIFA Congress to permit such situations.

In accordance with article 33, paragraph 1 of the FIFA Statutes, the Emergency Committee deals with all matters requiring immediate settlement between two meetings of the Executive Committee. Therefore, and having examined the facts of the matter at hand, on 16 March 2004, the FIFA Emergency Committee ruled as follows:

1. Any player who refers to the first sentence of article 15, paragraph 1 of the Regulations Governing the Application of the FIFA Statutes to assume a new nationality shall only be eligible to play for the new national team if he fulfils one of the following conditions:
 - a) the player was born on the territory of the relevant Association;
 - b) his biological mother or biological father was born on the territory of the relevant Association;
 - c) his grandmother or grandfather was born on the territory of the relevant Association;
 - d) he has lived continuously for at least two years on the territory of the relevant Association.
2. The decision outlined in point 1 above enters into force immediately and is final (cf. article 33, paragraph 3 of the FIFA Statutes).

Thank you for taking note of the above and for communicating this information to your member clubs.

Yours faithfully,
FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE
DE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

Urs Linsi
General Secretary

cc: - FIFA Executive Committee
- Confederations