

《Frenchman Champagne only candidate to attend FIFA Presidenti》

Five candidates in the FIFA Presidential race are in the running to replace Sepp Blatter but a planned televised debate between them this week ended in shambles with just one candidate turning up.

A Presidential debate - but with only one candidate. FIFA presidential hopeful Jerome Champagne faced the media and politicians on his own in the European Parliament after the late withdrawals of two other participants.

But far from being daunted by that prospect, the Frenchman seized the opportunity to outline his hopes for football's top job should he succeed in his bid.

"Why did I decide to run I decided to run first because I want to save FIFA. Football today is a very important political, economic and social activity. And we have to be extremely careful because if there is no governance, more and more people will try and grab the game for purely political, economic or even criminal activities," Jerome Champagne said.

Prince Ali Bin Al Hussein of Jordan and South African businessman Tokyo Sexwale pulled out of the forum on Monday after being told an appearance could break FIFA's election rules on political interference. Organizers deny it would be an infraction and were further angered with FIFA for failing to clarify the issue.

"I think it is a missed opportunity for FIFA and for football. I think collectively, FIFA comes out of it badly. They could have given advice to candidates that they were free to take part in this debate if they chose to do so, so what today showed was that just because the candidates are away, people's interests in the issue hasn't gone away," said Damian Collins, "New FIFA Now" co-founder.

There was one footballer in attendance. Former Tottenham defender Ramon Vega has future FIFA Presidential ambitions of his own but in the meantime he's calling on those in this particular race to show greater accountability.

"I find it a shame to be honest with you as it would have been great to see on this platform all of these candidates come forward and really see the transparency of them individually. But we saw today where an image where for FIFA, it is not good," Ramon Vega said.

This debate may have ended in farce but that does not distract from the serious business that lies ahead. There is now less than a month to go before the world football federation's vote for the next FIFA President. And whoever wins that race, will have a tough job to restore FIFA's battered image.