James Dostoyevsky *-*

Sepp Blatter, the decorated former President of FIFA, who has more honorary degrees, noble titles and other high awards than almost anyone else who springs to mind, has published yet another ‘book’.

This one is called ‘Overtime – The True Story’.

But instead of ‘Overtime’, it is Overkill, and instead of ‘The true story’, it is a selective dissection of reality - at best.

This ‘true story’ starts with 15 pages of unadulterated sycophancy by a former Federal Councillor, no less, followed by a writer who penned the script for his employer. If there was any expectation of a ‘true story’, those two guys killed it off up front and with some ease.

One is the former President of the Swiss Confederation, a former Defence Minister, a former Finance Minister, and, to his fame, the longest-sitting Member of the Federal Council (Switzerland’s version of government). The fighter for anything and everything that is staunchly right-wing, Ueli Maurer delivers a not-so memorable ‘laudatio’ of a man who has achieved a lot and whose career ended in utter disgrace.

The second prologue is delivered by a writer who, similarly to Maurer, also hails from a very right corner, and whose biggest career move has been to be called up to serve the failed Football Master as whatever you want to call it: ghostwriter, apologist, aggressive defender and painfully mediocre ghost-writer.

Between Ueli and Sepp there’s Thomas, the ghostly author. Of course ‘Uli der Knecht’ comes to mind and all sorts of other tales by deified Swiss author Jeremias Gotthelf, whom few know outside the Alpine lands.

Gotthelf’s characters are usually simpletons, cringe-comedic figures, quite desperate for romance, all quite spent, so as not to offend. The ghost Blatter called to serve, the former President of his tiny country, and the former President of a vast footballing empire, are a fine fit – both politically and in intellectual prowess. Where others excel, the Swiss work. Always streetwise, often with a humble education, but always willing to please. It’s a thing. It once worked, it no longer does.

So this pamphlet – don’t call it a book, really, given that its 15 chapters are quite slim: most of them average four pages (!) in quite large print, so as to please the old fogies who would read it ‘faute de mieux’.

Starting with Chapter One, ‘I would never have increased the number of World Cup participants’, all the way to the last ‘souffle’, “Madiba, Nelson Mandela and I’ they are all a difficult read. Not because they are demanding – far from it.

Where this book is demanding not because of a sophisticated or complex writing style (the pamphlet adheres staunchly to primary school verbiage, syntax and content) but because of a complete lack of ‘The truth’. It’s all the way good old Blatter sees it.

That ‘Sepp’ as a middle name (which it never was) is a telling thing. The man called Joseph was always called ‘Sepp’ from the early days at school where he, a short boy, was incessantly bullied, he says. The grand master of make-believe, good old Joseph slipped in a middle name over time, one he never had. But the ‘S’ sounded more important, didn’t it. Did he need it? Dato Joseph S. Blatter does sound a tad better than Dato Sepp, you’ve got to admit.

After the first 56 pages (chapters 1-8) come 16 full-colour pages of photographic adulations: Blatter with Merkel, Blatter with the Pope, Blatter with Mandela and of course Blatter with the disgusting war criminal Kissinger (who passed away unfortunately too early to write a distasteful prologue).

A particularly unsavoury full-page picture is the one with the Palestinian FA’s Jibril Al Rajoub and Israeli FA chief Avi Luzon. Of course, and despite the brochure’s title (he says it’s a book), no mention is made of the Palestinian Passport Blatter received from Al Rajoub in beautiful Dubai, at the Jumeirah Beach Hotel, years ago. That’s probably because the only person at FIFA who ever gave a damn for Palestine was Jerome Champagne, speech-writer extraordinaire of the President – and a well-oiled former French Consul in the US.

Blatter never gave a damn for “those Arabs”, even if he would never have been President of FIFA without the massive support of one such Arab, Mohamed Bin Hammam, when Blatter moved against his former boss in Paris and used all means to beat Johannsen, a gentleman, and UEFA President at the time. Included in the support was Bin Hammam’s private jet and the Qatari’s genuine charm and access to many more things than jets.

That truth-thing is evasive, if not entirely absent. If Blatter’s (Thomas Renggli’s, really) latest oeuvre, a colourful brochure in the guise of a book disguised the truth, if that oeuvre had any semblance of the truth, key characters of Blatter’s reign would be mentioned, if not honoured: Bin Hammam (whom he betrayed), Austin ‘Jack’ Warner (whom he despised and called racially charged names), Chuck Blazer (whom he hated and labelled with all sorts of anti-semitic epitaphs even when he was alive), and then of course the deceased Jamaican Army Captain, Horace Burrell, who stood up to be counted (as a Blatter supporter) in Seoul, and without whose solid and daring defence (and that of Warner), Blatter would have lost the presidential election against Issa Hayatou.

So truth, as the brochure promises in the title, it really isn’t. It is a one-sided tale of a very personal kind (one that doesn’t stand up to scrutiny), from A-Z, or pages 16-108. That’s it, the ‘book’: 92 pages of 12-16 point size in easy-to-read fonts, revealing little that an interested and informed reader wouldn’t already know. And the last 32 pages of dripping adulations by a number of questionable players don’t help much either (Mark Pieth? You serious? The same guy whose report was “edited” by Blatter’s legal eagle?).

The one genuine part of the “book” is the one-pager by Corinne Blatter, Sepp’s daughter and closest and honest ally.

All others, allies and ‘friends’ are accessories dished out by a man who never had any real friends. And the ones he could have had, he dismissed or pushed away.

Chuck Blazer, the only General Secretary ever to become a Member of the ill-famed FIFA Executive Committee (now FIFA Council), once famously said: “You know you’re in serious trouble the moment Sepp calls you ‘his friend’.” A sad and true statement confirmed by far too many who know him, worked with him, and were eventually used by him, until their ‘friendship’ was abused by him and they were forgotten, cast aside.

Blatter – and that of course is missing from his pamphlet, too – is a user. He had a kind of a dripping charm that most people mistook for interest, care even. But there was no such. Although to expect any sort of self-flagellation from a man who mistook and misunderstood his own relevance, would be asking too much. Sadly.

There is one aspect of his life where he tells his tale consistently, and where he tells (his) truth with few holds barred: Blatter’s disgust for Gianni Infantino (shared by most people in world football, bar those who keep being ‘bought’ with favours and hard cash contributions from his FIFA).

“No, no…he’s not from the Valais. He’s Italian,” Blatter said of Infantino in an interview with [www.insideparadeplatz.ch](http://www.insideparadeplatz.ch) the other day. There, Blatter shows glimpses of his old fighting spirit and reflects on the lawyer-cum-football administrator’s career. “He applied for a job as a young lawyer at FIFA”, he told ‘friends’ many times over, “but I didn’t hire him. He wasn’t smart enough” (I am paraphrasing although the gist is accurate).

Blatter really dislikes Infantino, and he hates the fact that he was succeeded by an incompetent, a parvenu, a guy who – incomprehensibly – stays on and keeps digging his heels in what appear to the rest of the world to be all sorts of desert sands. That part of Blatter’s “truth” is credible because one thing is true: he always hated incompetence. After all, he tried to hire not only yeah-sayers, but the also the very rare nay-sayer (who usually had one up on him) like Valcke.

He doesn’t tell the true tale of FIFA’s is legal counsel (“he is my lawyer, too, not only FIFA’s lawyer”, he once said to a ranking aide – a fact unlawful in itself), who was instrumental in his, Blatter’s betrayal. He doesn’t tell the truth about the German World Cup and how the 10-million-hole came about (still discussed in German court), he doesn’t shed any truth on Dempsey’s sudden departure, before an ExCo vote clinched yet another World Cup deal. He doesn’t mention Havelange’s and Teixeira’s accounts at a private bank on Zurich’s “Central” square. He doesn’t tell the tale of Weber’s ISL dealings (nor the fact how he supported him with crumbs). Batter sheds no light on the relationship between himself and the man he betrayed like no other: he and Bin Hammam had an agreement. Blatter was to step down and Bin Hammam was to succeed him. Except he betrayed that ‘friend’ too. The one who made it possible that he, Sepp, beat Johannsen in 1998. Without Bin Hammam there was no Blatter. And with Blatter breaking his word – repeatedly – there could never be a Bin Hammam President.

Blatter’s brochure, ghost-written by someone who has no clue about what life really was like inside FIFA, depicts him as a liar to those who know the truth.

While crucially involved with convincing the “old” Emir that a Qatar World Cup would be the cat’s whiskers, he fought tooth and nail *against* Qatar *after* they won the Bid. He tried everything and used all ruses, tricks and methods to get the World Cup away from them. All along claiming – to the new Emir – how he was proud of the first World Cup in the Middle East. His brochure, doesn’t tell the truth about that either. His memory is selective, and the writer who took down the thoughts to put them into half-way useful German language, just couldn’t do better than he did. It’s mediocre at best and embarrassing throughout, if you know who the alleged provider of input is.

If you want to waste CHF 41.90 on a ‘biography’, don’t. It’s not worth the paper it is printed on.

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