
On the Teboho Mokoena Saga

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This is a response to an article published online in Sunday World on 9 September 2025, authored by Kgomotso Mokoena.¹

The article quotes an anonymous SAFA source who assured the reporter that Bafana Bafana will not lose points following the alleged unlawful fielding of player Teboho Mokoena in a match against Lesotho on 21 March 2025. South African beat Lesotho 2-0 in a 2026 FIFA World Cup Qualifier.

There are two FIFA regulations that come into play here. One is the *FIFA World Cup 2026 Preliminary Competition Regulations* and the other is the *FIFA Disciplinary Code*.

The relevant rule in the *FIFA World Cup 2026 Preliminary Competition Regulations* reads as follows (verbatim):

14 Eligibility of players

1. Each association shall ensure the following when selecting its representative team for the preliminary competition of the FIFA World Cup 2026TM:

a. All players shall hold the nationality of its country and be subject to its jurisdiction.

b. All players shall be eligible for selection in accordance with the FIFA Statutes, the Regulations Governing the Application of the FIFA Statutes and other relevant FIFA rules and regulations.

2. **The participating member associations shall be responsible for fielding only eligible players.** Failure to do so shall lead to the consequences stipulated in the FIFA Disciplinary Code.
3. Protests regarding the eligibility of players shall be decided by the FIFA Disciplinary Committee in accordance with the FIFA Disciplinary Code.



What does this mean?

- There is no room for misinterpretation of Regulation 14(2). **It is the responsibility of the Member**

¹ https://sundayworld.co.za/sports/soccer/bafana-wont-lose-points/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=bafana-wont-lose-points

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Association to track the yellow cards.

- Inside the Association, **it is the responsibility of the Team Manager to keep track of the cautions** and to inform the Coach BEFORE he selects his squad.

What process is followed when the Association does not comply with Regulation 14(2)?

The FIFA Disciplinary Code specifies the process to be employed. The FIFA Disciplinary Committee will act according to Article 19 of the FIFA Disciplinary Code. That Article states:

1. If a player fielded in a match and/or competition is declared ineligible, the FIFA judicial bodies, taking into consideration the integrity of the competition concerned, **may impose any appropriate disciplinary measures**.
2. If a player fielded in a match is declared ineligible **following a protest**, the team to which the player belongs will be sanctioned by forfeiting the match and paying a minimum fine of CHF 6,000. The player may also be sanctioned.
3. The Disciplinary Committee may act *ex officio*.

In this case, Lesotho did not file a valid protest, so Article 19(2) is not applicable and there will be **no automatic points deduction**. But the DC can still deduct the points at its discretion in terms of Article 19(1). Article 19(3) gives the DC the power to act without a complaint being filed.

So, in terms of the Code, **the FIFA DC can decide to deduct the 3 points or impose a fine or do both. They will not pronounce on the guilt or innocence of the responsible person in the association.**

Holding the responsible person accountable is SAFA's decision regardless of the FIFA DC verdict.

The DC will be faced with two scenarios, so the following principles apply:

- **In the first scenario, if the rules are not silent** on who is responsible for ensuring only eligible players are fielded, the party stated in the rules as the responsible party must ensure that the player is not fielded. In the case in point, Article 14(2) of the *FIFA World Cup 2026 Preliminary Competition Regulations* places the responsibility on the participating member to ensure that only eligible players are fielded.



- **In the second scenario, if the rules are silent**, the principle of **strict liability** applies, meaning that the team is responsible for ensuring that the ineligible player does not participate in the next match, even if the rules do not explicitly state who is responsible for enforcement. FIFA has no obligation to notify the Association on the number of

cautions issued. But in this case the rules are not silent.

FIFA and CAS consistently apply the principle of *strict liability* to disciplinary matters, including suspensions due to yellow card accumulation.

If Article 14(2) did not exist, the principle of strict liability will apply because Article 9(3) of the *FIFA World Cup 2026 Preliminary Competition Regulations* states that if players or team officials receive two cautions in one match (in matches decided by penalties) or in two different matches of the competition, they will be **automatically suspended** from their team's subsequent match.

Even if the tournament organizer (FIFA) fails to notify the team of the suspension, the team is still expected to be aware of the player's eligibility status.

As noted above, Article 14(2) of the *FIFA World Cup 2026 Preliminary Competition Regulations* makes the participating member association the responsible party.

So, the FIFA Disciplinary Committee may then still impose the 3 goals deficit which will be reconciled against the remaining goals forward, which will now reduce or eliminate our goal difference. A catastrophe that's been downplayed by the leadership.

In summary:

- The FIFA Disciplinary Committee will act according to Article 19 of the FIFA Disciplinary Code.
- The practical implications are:
 - Teams are expected to track their players' cautions and suspensions.
 - If an ineligible player participates, the team could face disciplinary sanctions such as forfeiture of the match (e.g., a 3-0 loss by default).

- The FIFA DC can still decide to deduct the points.

Tournament organizers (FIFA or CAF) often provide notifications, but their failure to do so does not absolve the team of responsibility.

The FIFA Disciplinary Code leaves the decision to the FIFA Disciplinary Committee to decide how they want to sanction SAFA in accordance with Article 19(1) and "**may impose any appropriate disciplinary measures**". That could include a 3-point deduction or they can simply levy a fine.

The Disciplinary Committee has not pronounced on it yet.

