
No Way Back: FIFA's Sanction on Bafana Bafana Will Stand

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FIFA has spoken, and the verdict is brutal. South Africa's national team has been slapped with a CHF10,000 fine, docked three points, and stripped of the two goals scored against Lesotho — with a three-goal penalty added to boot. The mathematics is stark: Bafana Bafana's goal difference has been cut by five, leaving us with +3 while Benin, our main rival in Group C, now sit on +4, pushing them to the top of the log.

The punishment does not end our 2026 FIFA World Cup qualification campaign, but it has left us clinging to life support. To survive, Bafana Bafana must now beat Zimbabwe and Rwanda — and do so by convincing margins — while keeping one eye on Benin's results. Qualification is still possible, but it now depends as much on permutations and luck as on our own performance.

The Finality of FIFA's Word

Some may wonder whether this sanction can be appealed. The short answer is no. The long answer lies in Chapter 4 of the FIFA Disciplinary Code.

SCENARIO 1

- Article 60 gives the Appeal Committee jurisdiction to hear appeals unless FIFA regulations declare a decision “final.”
- Article 61 then limits the kinds of cases that may be appealed. No appeal is allowed if the punishment is:
 - a warning or reprimand,
 - a suspension of up to two matches or two months,
 - a fine of up to CHF15,000 against an association (or CHF7,500 in other cases), or
 - decisions passed under certain specific articles of the Code.



South Africa's case falls squarely within those limits. The fine is CHF10,000.00 — comfortably below the appeal threshold. The three-point deduction and the goal penalty, while devastating, are not even listed as grounds for appeal in the rules. Article 61(3) does allow appeals if one sanction exceeds the limits.

In other words, the door to appeal is closed before SAFA even reaches for the handle. The Disciplinary Committee's decision is final and binding.

A Governance Failure, Not Bad Luck

The rules are not ambiguous. Article 14(2) of the World Cup Preliminary Regulations places the burden on each national association to ensure that only eligible

players are fielded. FIFA does not track suspensions for you. The team manager must count cautions, the coach must be informed, and the association must enforce.

The principle of strict liability, long recognised by both FIFA and the Court of Arbitration for Sport, means that excuses don't count. Negligence is treated the same as wilful misconduct. The consequence is the same: points lost, fines imposed, reputations tarnished.

This is not bad luck. It is a preventable failure in football governance.

What Lies Ahead

With Zimbabwe and Rwanda still to play, the campaign is not over. But the task has become far harder. Even two victories may not be enough if Benin keep their advantage. Our qualification hopes now hinge not just on Bafana Bafana's own performances, but also on results elsewhere.

For a country with our footballing tradition, this is a humiliating position to be in. We are no longer masters of our own destiny; we are spectators in a drama we helped script through administrative incompetence.

A Lesson Written in Red Ink

The sanction is not just a punishment; it is a lesson. Football is as much about governance as it is about goals. The structures that ensure eligibility, compliance, and discipline are just as vital as strikers and defenders. When those structures fail, the whole nation pays the price.

South African football must absorb this truth. FIFA's decision is final. The points are gone. The fine must be paid. The goals are erased. The qualification campaign now

rests on hope, mathematics, and the ability to win under pressure.

It did not have to be this way. But until SAFA embraces accountability and professionalism at every level, we will remain at the mercy of rules that other nations seem to navigate without tripping over.

Scenario 2

The wording of Article 61 FIFA Disciplinary Code is tricky, and the interpretation has direct consequences for whether an appeal is possible in your scenario. Let's break it down carefully:

1. The structure of Article 61(1)

- The general rule:

"An appeal may be lodged ... against any decision passed by the Disciplinary Committee, unless the disciplinary measure issued is ..."

- Then follow the exceptions (a–e).

This means: the default position is that all DC decisions can be appealed, except those measures specifically listed in 61(1)(a–e).

So the word "unless" is excluding those listed sanctions from appeal.

2. The phrase "exceed the limits" in Article 61(3)

- Art. 61(3) deals with cases where the DC combines multiple sanctions. It says:

"If the Disciplinary Committee combines disciplinary measures, an appeal is admissible if at least one of the disciplinary measures imposed exceeds the above limits ..."

- The "limits" referred to here are precisely the ones in 61(1)(a–d). These are the

thresholds that make a sanction non-appealable if it does not exceed them.

Examples:

- Suspension of 2 matches → not appealable.
- Suspension of 3 matches → appealable (because it “exceeds the limit”).
- Fine of CHF 15,000 to an association → not appealable.
- Fine of CHF 20,000 to an association → appealable (exceeds the limit).
- Importantly: Article 61(1)(e) refers to decisions under specific compliance provisions. Those are not about “limits” but about subject matter. They are excluded absolutely, so Art. 61(3) does not “save” them.

3. Applying this to the Bafana Bafana sanction

The DC decision was:

- Annulment of a match result (2–0 win annulled).
- Deduction of 3 points.
- A 3-goal penalty added (reducing goal difference by 5).

This is a sporting sanction affecting competition results — it is not a mere warning, reprimand, short suspension, or small fine.

Therefore:

- It does not fall under the exceptions in 61(1)(a–d).
- It is not a “decision passed in compliance with articles 21, 23.2, 23.3 or 23.4” (so not caught by 61(1)(e)).

Thus the sanction exceeds the limits (because it is more severe than the unappealable categories).

So under Article 61(1) + 61(3), in this scenario, the appeal is admissible.

4. Likelihood of admissibility vs. likelihood of success in this scenario

- Admissibility: Very high (≈95%). This is the kind of sporting sanction the appeal system was designed to review.
- Success on merits: Different question — depends on grounds (procedural irregularity, proportionality, ultra vires, or lack of factual/legal basis). But at least access to the Appeal Committee is open. However, the facts of the case are not in dispute. The player was fielded illegally.

Conclusion:

1. The phrase “exceed the limits” in Article 61(3) refers to the thresholds in 61(1)(a–d), not to other matters.
2. The wording of Article 61(1) means that the measures listed in 61(1)(a–e) cannot be appealed.
3. The word “unless” is excluding the listed sanctions from appeal.

The FIFA DC states in its decision that only the forfeiture is appealable.

In view of the precedents already set, the possibility of success remains remote.

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