

NEW WORLD ORDER

*Changes At FIM
Herald Fairness, Opportunity*

In this column space in the December issue of this magazine, I wrote about the relationship between the AMA and the Fédération Internationale de Motocyclisme, the world governing body for motorcycle sport. I mentioned that the FIM was in the midst of an election to replace its outgoing president and that there would likely be changes brought about by the incoming administration.

To say that the election had all the palace intrigue of the selection of a new Pope would be an understatement. As it turns out, one of the two candidates for president dropped out of the race just prior to the election, citing health issues.

Although this left only one candidate for the position, the outgoing administration attempted to block the new president from taking office in an effort to hold on to power a little longer.

Despite that attempt, and while the process that led to his election wasn't pretty, Jorge Viegas from Portugal was legitimately elected the new president of the FIM. Viegas is the founder of the Motorcycling Federation of Portugal (FMP). He served as president of the FMP for 23 years, has served as deputy president of the FIM and was serving as a member of the FIM Board of Directors prior to his election as president. He is also a member of the Executive Board of the Portuguese Olympic Committee. He is a former racer himself and an avid motorcyclist.

Viegas says that he founded FMP due to corruption in the previous FIM member federation from Portugal. Although he previously served as outgoing FIM President Vito Ippolito's deputy president, Viegas ran against Ippolito four years ago, in part because he didn't like the way Ippolito's FIM was treating its member federations.

Fans of AMA Supercross will remember that it was during Ippolito's tenure that the FIM interrupted James Stewart's career, arguably prematurely ending it, by its mishandling of his suspension for the presence of a prohibited substance for which Stewart was later granted a therapeutic use exemption. It took eight months for Stewart to even get an FIM hearing and the 16-month suspension he received was ridiculous, particularly in light of how poor the FIM's process was.

From our perspective—one shared by member federations from other countries—the FIM administration often demonstrated vindictiveness toward federations that supported Viegas in the previous election, which included the AMA.

The AMA supported Viegas in that election because we shared his view that the FIM was dictating to its member federations and we did not have enough say in the world organization,

despite the fact that the FIM's statutes and strategic plan called for greater involvement of the member federations.

Jorge Viegas wasted no time in bringing about change to the FIM. The day after his election, he held a board meeting that I participated in as incoming president of FIM North America, one of the six continental unions within which national federations are organized. The first order of business was a recognition by the board that the existing administration was not working. Action came swiftly, and the CEO was relieved of his duties that day. Viegas was named interim CEO, a position he would hold while he searched for a replacement executive.

Viegas travelled to Switzerland that week and removed the deputy CEO, who was also FIM's attorney. Although Viegas made other immediate staff changes, it was the removal of the CEO and deputy CEO that were most relevant to U.S. racers and race fans.

Similar to the situation with James Stewart mentioned above, these individuals were ultimately responsible for the mishandling of the suspension of

another American AMA Supercross rider, Broc Tickle, for the presence of a banned substance. Tickle's alleged infraction occurred at the beginning of the AMA Supercross season last year. The new AMA Supercross season began in January and Tickle had yet to have a hearing.

FIM Medical Director David McManus has taken all of the heat publicly for the FIM's mishandling of Tickle's case but the reality is that the blame rests squarely with the FIM attorney who prevented Tickle from getting the due process that he should have been afforded.

Sadly, Tickle's is not the only case of ineptitude regarding suspensions that the new FIM administration must fix. At that first board meeting, Viegas tasked a newly elected member of the Board, who also happens to be an attorney, with looking into these outstanding cases and getting them adjudicated. The AMA has been working with him to get Tickle's case resolved.

Also at that first Board meeting, Jorge Viegas appointed me chairman of the FIM Board Finance Committee. With his support, I was also elected by the presidents of the other continental unions to represent them on the executive committee of the FIM Board. There is no doubt that the AMA will have more influence with the FIM than we have had in the past.

The quality that Jorge Viegas possesses that is most significant to AMA members is that he is a friend of the AMA—and I consider him a personal friend. Viegas and I don't always agree on everything but he recognizes the importance of the AMA and other member federations to the FIM.

We are entering a new era in our relationship with the FIM. I believe that the FIM will now become more responsive and accountable to its member federations. I intend to do what I can to ensure that this happens and that the AMA, as an organization working tirelessly to promote and protect the motorcycle lifestyle in the United States, will take advantage of that relationship.

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By Rob Dingman