
World Athletics Championships disaster proves why World Cup 2022 is doomed

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The stadia will be gleaming, the air-conditioning humming away inside but unless the state-of-the-art technology can also deliver holograms of spectators it is doomed to failure.

The decision to stage the World Athletics Championships in Doha, the Qatari capital, has been a disaster, the attendance pathetic.

The depressing sight of the fastest woman on the planet, Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, waving to a non-existent crowd as she paraded around the Khalifa International Stadium with her two-year-old son Zyon summed up the apathy.

The event should never have gone there.

Qatar's bid for the championships is under criminal investigation in France. A preliminary charge of active corruption over a \$3.5m payment to an IAAF official has been filed against Paris St Germain's Qatari owner Nasser Al-Khelaifi. He denies wrongdoing.

What the past week has shown - if we did not know already – is that a World Cup in Qatar is an accident waiting to happen.

It is all well and good expanding a sport's horizons and looking beyond the obvious but there has to be buy-in from the host nation to make it work.

When Qatar hosted the UCI Road World Championships three years ago the cyclists had

equally invisible support.

What has made the current Rugby World Cup a success in a country where the sport is – or was until the victory over Ireland - relatively niche has been the Japanese public. Ninety-six per cent of the 1.8m tickets have been sold, the majority to the domestic market.

The Tokyo Olympics next year will work similarly well for the same reason.

Japan has a massive population of 126m, Qatar's is 2.6m. There just aren't the numbers to host a football tournament on this scale - even if there was the interest.

But there isn't.

When a reporter from the Press Association went to the gulf state last season to cover a home match for the league leaders Al Duhail in the Qatari Stars League there was no attendance figure released so he did a head count instead. It came to 155.

FIFA's hope is that the World Cup will be a regional tournament, drawing in support from across the whole of the Middle East. That looks unlikely in the current political climate with Qatar being frozen out by its neighbours for pursuing a more open relationship with Iran.

Will supporters from Europe bale out the organisers? The winter sunshine at a December World Cup may be appealing but probably not the alcohol restrictions.

A vanity project from an absurdly rich but tiny country chasing the kudos of staging the world's biggest football tournament is about to blow up in their faces.

For FIFA too the embarrassment could be colossal although as an organisation it does not really do shame. Eleven of the 22 FIFA committee members who voted on where the 2022 World Cup should be held have since been fined, suspended, banned for life or prosecuted for corruption.

The alternative bids for 2022 came from Japan, Australia, South Korea and the United States. How different the landscape for the next World Cup would have looked had any one of those been successful.
