

Football ban just one more sign of the times

Sorry ladies, it's still a man's world. If you doubt it, just review the world's media coverage of Iranian matters last week. First, President Ahmadinejad sent President Bush an 18-page letter. It was a minor political chess move in the ongoing push and shove over Iran's desire to develop nuclear power and possibly nuclear weapons. Despite the long-term insignificance of this letter, however, it sucked up tons of media attention. It was reported as hard news and then discussed endlessly by the talking heads on TV. What is intriguing here is that the letter was given so much more attention than another Iran story last week, one that probably slipped quietly by you.



Opinion
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Earlier this month, President Ahmadinejad had said women would be allowed to attend football matches (they would have to sit in segregated sections, however). But before Iranian women even had a chance to buy

their tickets, Iran's supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, came out and booted the whole idea. According to Iran's top clerics, it is immoral for a woman to attend a football match because she would be looking at the bodies of male strangers. Iran is a theocracy, so the holy men got the last word. To make sure, the religious leaders even went so far as to threaten to unleash suicide bombers if women were not kept out of sports stadiums. So, football matches in Iran remain off limits to females. News coverage of this sad affair included little more than a modest AP report and a BBC story, both were pretty much lost in the media wilderness.

Another indication of where women really rank is this week's call for a ban on Iran's World Cup team by some members of Germany's parliament. They don't want Iran at this summer's World Cup finals in Germany because they feel Iran's pursuit of nuclear technology and President Ahmadinejad's claim that the Holocaust is a myth, his call for Israel to be "wiped off the map" are too disturbing

to ignore. The German politicians have drawn attention to important matters, but why are women's issues not on their list too?

Why is overt government/religious mistreatment of women never the big story? Why does it so rarely make page one or lead the evening news? How is it that some governments are able to treat women as subhuman without drawing meaningful international condemnation? Where are the economic sanctions and the Olympic boycotts on behalf of women? Why doesn't FIFA take a stand against Iran's treatment of female football fans? Why not simply say to Iran, "play fair at home or you won't play away"?

Strangely, gender discrimination just doesn't register with the public, the media or with western politicians in the way racial apartheid in South Africa did back in the 1970s and 1980s. Imagine if a country set to play in

the World Cup finals announced today that it was illegal for black people to attend football matches within its borders. Unlike when it comes to women, the world's outrage would be instant and thundering. And I doubt FIFA would be silent about it.

It is a bizarre reality of the early 21st century that hundreds of millions of women are openly and terribly mistreated and denied opportunities, thanks to traditions, cultures, religions and laws. To be clear, I'm not suggesting that any country has fully met the challenge of gender fairness to date. But I'm not talking about glass ceilings, abusive husbands and women getting paid less than men for the same work. Those are serious issues, of course, but this is about women being told by a government how they must dress (Iran), girls being denied access to school (Afghanistan), and women forbidden by law to travel alone or even drive a car (Saudi Arabia). By any measure, to deny so much from so many is nothing less than madness and evil.

Does anyone notice? Does anyone care?



Khamenei

2006 FIFA World Cup

Two-time champion Argentina in Group C leads a division which may be the toughest in this year's World Cup competition in Germany, while Group D may be the weakest.

GROUP C

Appearance • best finish

GROUP D

TEAM	COACH	MATCH	SCHEDULE
Argentina 14th • Champion 1978, 1986	Jose Pekerman	5 21 37	June 10 • Ivory Coast 16 • Serbia-Mon. 21 • Netherlands
Ivory Coast First	Robert Nouzarat	5 22 38	10 • Argentina 16 • Netherlands 21 • Serbia-Mon.
Serbia-Montenegro First (as Yugoslavia 9th • Semifinals 1930, 1962)	Ilija Petkovic	6 21 38	11 • Netherlands 16 • Argentina 21 • Ivory Coast
Netherlands Eighth • Runner-up 1974, 1978	Marco van Basten	6 22 37	11 • Serbia-Mon. 16 • Ivory Coast 21 • Argentina

TEAM	COACH	MATCH	SCHEDULE
Mexico 13th • Quarterfinals 1970, 1986	Ricardo Lavolpe	7 23 39	June 11 • Iran 16 • Angola 21 • Portugal
Iran Third • First round 1978, 1998	Branko Ivankovic	7 24 40	11 • Mexico 17 • Portugal 21 • Angola
Angola First	Luis Oliveira Goncalvez	8 23 40	11 • Portugal 16 • Mexico 21 • Iran
Portugal Fourth • Third place 1966	Luiz Felipe Scolari	8 24 39	11 • Angola 17 • Iran 21 • Mexico

Reyna could play more defensive role

North Carolina (AP) - After spending two World Cups as an attacking playmaker for the United States, Claudio Reyna might find himself in a more defensive role at this year's tournament.

The team's training resumed Tuesday and many of the top players spent more than an hour each talking about what they expect to achieve at this year's World Cup.