

**OCEANIA FOOTBALL CONFEDERATION
ACTIVITY REPORT 2018**





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GOOD GOVERNANCE

2018 was a bumpy ride for the Oceania Football Confederation, its staff and its Member Associations following the resignation of long-serving General Secretary Tai Nicholas at the end of 2017 and the resignation of President David Chung in early 2018.

Subsequent investigations uncovered a number of discrepancies with the manner in which the previous management ran the organisation, specifically in regards to financial matters.

The OFC was placed under restriction by FIFA and sweeping changes were introduced to bring the governance of the Confederation in line with FIFA expectations.

Vanuatu Football Federation President Lambert Maltock was elected acting OFC President, while Franck Castillo was appointed acting General Secretary before being engaged permanently in the role. OFC also employed a Legal and Compliance Officer, New Zealander Barbara Lloyd, whose role would include ensuring the OFC statutes and policies are observed by staff and committee members.

The first item for the new leadership was to implement a governance reform process. The OFC Executive Committee at its April 8 meeting agreed to set up a Reform Committee to review the OFC Statutes and governance structures.

A FIFA Governance Workshop was held in Auckland, New Zealand on 8 and 9 August attended by representatives from each OFC Member Association. The workshop aimed to provide participants with information about the governance principles including what good governance is and the lessons learned from the FIFA Reform Process, the risks and recommendations based on the situation in their own MAs and at OFC level. Director of FIFA Reforms Luca Piazza was on hand to support and provide guidance, as was Luca Nicola, Head of Member Associations Governance Services, FIFA Secretary General Division. The workshop also allowed for the election of two MA representatives to the newly formed Reform Committee, which would analyse OFC governance risks and make recommendations on the basis of the identified risks, including possible changes to the OFC Statutes, to be considered by the OFC Executive Committee.

OFC REFORM COMMITTEE COMPOSITION



On 21 November 2018, the OFC Congress approved the new OFC Statutes integrating most of the amendments presented by the OFC Reform Committee and endorsed by the OFC Executive Committee.

The amendments solidified the governance principles for OFC providing clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the various bodies in response to a lack of separation of power between various bodies and role confusion as well as a lack of independence and accountability. The amendments also established term limits for elected office holders and introduced eligibility, independence and qualification criteria for office holders.

OFC Executive Committee members no longer have the right to represent their MA at Congress, with voting rights removed. Eligibility checks were introduced for Executive Committee Members, conducted by the newly established Eligibility Committee composed of independent members and compensation for Executive Committee members must now be approved by Congress.

The Congress also appointed a new auditor, RSM Hayes, after the firm was earlier approved by the OFC Executive Committee.

OFC President Lambert Maltock congratulated the executive members and the OFC Congress delegates for their support of the reform process, given its importance in moving the Confederation forward.

"We are proud of the changes being made to improve the governance of OFC and to press forward with the development of football which is, and must always be, our primary objective."

FIFA General Secretary Fatma Samoura attended the Congress to observe proceedings and congratulated the Confederation for its commitment to improving the governance structure in a manner which increases accountability and transparency.



OFC HOME OF FOOTBALL

The processes and procedures undertaken for the OFC Home of Football project came under investigation in 2018 for potential fraud. Because of this, all existing contracts and works being undertaken were terminated. An engineer was appointed to review the work which has been done on the administration building so far, and forensic auditors were appointed to investigate.

In light of the investigation, a decision was made by the OFC Executive Committee to continue with the project of developing a high-performance base for the Oceania region, but the scope of work was scaled down significantly compared with the original project.

With the change in scope, a new architect was sought to provide revised plans for the OFC Home of Football. Along with a new architect, a civil engineer, structural engineer and surveyor were also appointed.

Another part of moving the project forward saw OFC seeking to strengthen the relationship with Auckland Council and the Orakei Local Board.

OFC met in June with the Ngahue Reserve landowners, assuring them of their commitment not only to the completion of the development, but also the establishment of a long-term relationship between the parties.

The meeting provided an opportunity for OFC to outline their vision for the property, which currently has two artificial football fields, changing rooms and parking facilities completed.

OFC General Secretary Franck Castillo said with the overarching objective of having two Oceania nations competing at the FIFA World Cup™ 2026, the desire to complete this project is greater than ever.

"In order for our Football Development Strategy to be a success we need to continue developing the site, albeit with a changed scope of works and time frames.

"The Home of Football will become a High-Performance Centre for the region and the administrative headquarters for OFC."

During the Orakei Local Board meeting held in November, the project and its reduced scope was validated and a decision made to update the current agreement to lease to reflect the changes to the project.

A new timeline for the Home of Football has been established with construction estimated to be completed for an October 2020 inauguration.

ACROSS THE REGION

As has become common place ahead of the world's biggest footballing showpiece, the FIFA World Cup™ Trophy Tour was held to bring the coveted silverware to communities across the globe. Ahead of Russia 2018, three nations in Oceania were fortunate enough to have the FIFA World Cup Trophy visit their shores. The first stop was Tonga where former World Cup winner, France and New Caledonia football icon Christian Karembeu was on-hand to unveil the trophy in the presence of Deputy Prime Minister Semisi Sika.

Karembeu said accompanying the trophy back to Oceania was an honour, and he hoped local communities would make the most of their brush with history.

"We are going to inspire our youth to play football, promote it and implement the values of our sport which are respect and fairplay without discrimination, to build our future and nations."

The next stop on the FIFA World Cup Trophy Tour was the football-mad nation of Solomon Islands where large crowds hoped to catch a glimpse during its presentation at the airport. The final stop was in Papua New Guinea.

Category 4 Tropical Cyclone Gita hit Tonga hard in February, with winds of up to 233 km/h slamming the south coast of Tongatapu. While staff of the Tonga Football Association and their families were unharmed, homes were damaged as was the fields and buildings at the Loto-Tonga Soka Centre. The external futsal court suffered the worst of damage with tiles and goals bearing the brunt.

New Zealand Football and the New Zealand Professional Footballer's Association (NZPFA) announced the completion of a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) in May. The CBA saw the two organisations finalise an agreement which reflected the need for change. The revised CBA offers four key factors for both the elite male and female footballers in the nation; pay parity, equal prize money, equal rights for image use and, parity across travel while representing New Zealand. Former All White and NZPFA Chief Executive Harry Ngata was pleased with the terms of the new agreement.

"We are delighted to have a combined agreement across our All Whites and Football Ferns. We are confident this will add positive benefits to our elite programmes, not just for today's players but for those of tomorrow. The focus on gender equality was a significant outcome the men were extremely passionate about. The nature of this agreement will be the first of its kind and we're hopeful this will encourage other organisations to adopt a similar approach."



Three Oceania representatives were named on the FIFA Beat Men's and Women's Player and Coach panels. Former Football Fern Maia Jackman, Former All White and Oceania Player of the Century Wynton Rufer and OFC Technical Director Patrick Jacquemet helped choose the shortlist for the annual award.

In Papua New Guinea the Women's League was relaunched after a lengthy hiatus. The goal for the first season is to feature four regional teams – Southern, Momase, Highlands and New Guinea Islands – to get an idea of the current status of the women's game. The intention is then to review the competition and identify a preferred competition structure to best serve the long-term interest of women's football development across the country.

Elections were held in several Member Associations in 2018. In the Cook Islands long-serving President Lee Harmon was re-elected, as was American Samoa's Iuli Alex Godinet. The Papua New Guinea Football Association held an election to fill the post left vacant by David Chung who resigned earlier in the year. Hekari United franchise owner John Kapi Natto will see out the remainder of the term, with a new election scheduled for 2019.

FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2019-2026

As a result of funding restrictions, the OFC Technical Department was limited in terms of its activities in 2018. Rather than rest on their laurels, the team led by Technical Director Patrick Jacquemet opted to spend their time in the office being productive.

The result is the Football Development Strategy 2019-2026.

The introduction of 1 ½ spots at the FIFA World Cup™ 2026, as announced by the FIFA Council, has a direct impact on the Oceania Football Confederation's vision and football development. Having two Oceania teams attend this event forms the foundation upon which the strategic goals have been based and developed.

OFC Football Development Strategic Goals:

- To leave a legacy
- Competitive Member Associations at OFC Competitions
- Competitive OFC teams at FIFA World Cups

These goals have been established with the intention of using football as a tool for social, educational and cultural development so that it gives people a future perspective and opportunities for growth in the Oceania region.

OFC, and in particular the OFC Technical Department, will use tailor-made activities, resources and policies to foster the region's passion for football, enhancing social and cultural awareness and promoting education through football in each of its Member Associations.

The Football Development Strategy covers all aspects undertaken by Jacquemet's team including Education, Player Development, Elite Football, Goalkeeping, Women's Football, Futsal, Beach Soccer, Refereeing and Medical.

It also incorporates the Competitions strategy and a strategy for Clubs and Leagues, linking the work being undertaken by the OFC Competitions Department to improve competition structures, establish consistent formats and introduce club licensing, with football development from a grassroots level and up.





KEY MOMENTS, TECHNICAL DEPARTMENT



EDUCATION - THE COACHING PATHWAY

The Oceania Football Confederation has recognised the New Zealand Football A and B Licences through its coaching pathway. In 2018 the OFC Technical Department added a further two NZF courses to its list of accredited licences. The NZF Senior Level 2 and the Youth Level 3 became the OFC/NZF C Licence (Senior) and the OFC/NZF C Licence (Youth) respectively. In addition, the small-sided game was also included with the NZF Futsal Level 3 Coaching award becoming known as the OFC Futsal C Licence (Youth/Senior).

Two Oceania coaches were part of the inaugural intake of the FIFA Coach Mentorship Programme held in Zurich, Switzerland at FIFA's House of Football. Gemma Lewis from New Zealand Football who is the U-20 and U-17 women's assistant coach, and Stephanie Spielmann of the Federation Tahitienne de Football who is both the national team coach and women's football project manager.

The project is designed to assist female coaches by enabling them to acquire new knowledge, skills and experience which they can harness in their careers. Coaches from across the globe gathered for the two-day

course where they were paired with some of the biggest names in women's football, allowing them to benefit from invaluable first-hand advice, gain new ideas and share best practice.

Lewis was paired with Japan women's national team head coach Asako Takemoto, while Spielmann is being mentored by Belgium women's coach Ives Serneels. Communication between the coaches and their mentors continued after the workshop, with the programme due to conclude in November 2019.

Lewis, who works with many of New Zealand's up-and-coming female players on a regular basis as assistant coach of the Future Ferns Domestic Programme (FFDP), said the opportunity will be fantastic for her personal development.

"Getting the opportunity to be mentored by an experienced coach and have FIFA invest in me like this is something I'm really excited about."



- INSTRUCTORS COURSE

Nine OFC Member Associations were represented in Auckland, New Zealand in June when the FIFA/OFC Instructors Course was held over five days at the OFC Academy.

OFC Head of Education Giovanni Fernandes said the main objective was to empower the coaching educators to deliver their own programmes, within their own context and adapted to the realities of their Member Associations.

“Our approach is to have active participation of the candidates in the course and a lot of reality-based experience so they will actually have to do things that they do in their Member Associations, in that way, along with the FIFA experts present, we can share and support each other to improve,” Fernandes explained.

Joining Fernandes in presenting during the course were several FIFA experts; Head of Coaching and Player Development Branimir Ujevic, FIFA Senior Manager for Technical Development Jean-Marie Conz, UEFA’s John Peacock, CONCACAF Development Officer Etienne Siliee and Mohammed Basir from AFC.

For Ujevic, the course marked an important step forward for coach educators in Oceania.

“They are already experienced and they already deliver but now we have to explain to them a new approach about adult learning process, how to manage, how to facilitate the environment and how to get the most out of the coaching course.

“I would say the biggest change in our approach is not regarding only the course, but it’s also about the follow up as well. That means we are going to create one database of coaching instructors inside OFC and we are going to be permanently in touch with them.”

Jean-Marie Conz was impressed with the attitude of participants and excited about what they could achieve in their Member Associations.

“In terms of the level of knowledge we can see there are some differences between the Member Associations, but they all showed the ability to improve,” Conz said. “This is the first step because we don’t build instructors in five days, now they will have to go back and create courses and teach coaches and when we come back, we will follow the process and progress.”

- REFEREEING

In the lead up to each OFC competition, the OFC Referee Department holds a pre-event seminar bringing together all the appointed match officials. The objective of these workshops is to ensure the preparedness of the match officials for the task ahead.

Ahead of the OFC U-19 Championship in Tahiti, OFC Referee Development Officer Kevin Stoltenkamp led an OFC Elite Referee Seminar. Attended by 10 Referees and eight Assistant Referees, all FIFA, as well as two participants invited by the Federation Tahitienne de Football – the tournament hosts.

The three-day seminar covered the latest trends in regards to decision-making and the Laws of the Game, and was a chance for the match officials to prepare for the OFC U-19 Championship and the OFC U-16 Championship which followed.

Like all technical workshops and courses, the programme was a mix of theory and practical with classroom sessions taking place in the morning, followed by three hours on the grass cementing the morning’s learnings.

Despite having taken part in the FIFA World Cup Russia™, Tahitian referee Norbert Hauata made an effort to participate in the seminar in order to share his latest learnings.

“We are here to learn every day, that’s our target – to share our experience. I am very happy to share everything I get from the FIFA World Cup. I’m here to share with everyone,” Hauata said.

The annual FIFA FUTURO III Referee Instructors Course was held in Auckland, New Zealand with 48 participants from all 11 OFC Member Associations present to take part in the week-long activities.

The course covers futsal, beach soccer and football, with different instructors from around the world sharing their knowledge and experience with the attendees. The instructors included Malaysians Subkhiddin Mohd Salleh and Badrul Hisham Kalam, Perry Gaultier of Belgium and Deputy Head of FIFA Referee Department Manual Navarro.

The relevance of holding the course annually means match officials, via their local instructors, remain up-to-date with the new trends which emerge. For 2018 that includes trends from the FIFA World Cup for football, along with new trends from the Youth Olympic Futsal Tournament in Argentina.

Having been an instructor in the region previously and also having been present at the FIFA World Cup Russia™, Subkhiddin Mohd Salleh was in a good position to comment on the development of referees in Oceania and in particular how it has benefited from FUTURO III.

“I’m quite happy to see the performances of the referees at the World Cup. They’re improving quite a lot because they’re not only one time in the World Cup, they’ve been preparing for four to six years before. It’s very positive. I can seem Matthew Conger really prepared himself. He was confident in his decisions even in front of 40,000-plus spectators.

“The final result of this course, and courses like it, is that we have referees showing good examples at the World Cup. I think Matthew is an example of the result.” For Deputy Head of FIFA Referee Department Manual Navarro, holding the FUTURO III regularly has led to a marked improvement in referee development which translates into elite match officials.

“It’s the course where we teach the main instructors of each Member Association of OFC. It’s part of the whole refereeing development programme we have within FIFA. We guide our FIFA Instructors with the new teaching material, the philosophy of FIFA refereeing and then they go back to their Confederations and teach at courses like FUTURO III.

“The leading instructors of each Member Association is present so we can pass on the message of FIFA refereeing from the bottom up.”

The FUTURO III is divided into three parts – technical, futsal and fitness.

“We break it up because they each have their own teaching points for the modern referee,” Navarro said. FIFA Futsal Instructor Perry Gaultier of Belgium led the futsal section of the course and said the goals are very clear.

“The goal for this kind of event or seminar is to prepare instructors so they can spread the word, so they can start with development – that is the goal of this seminar. It’s very important that referees understand the Laws of the Game, that they are prepared, because futsal is really growing and we try to grow the teams, the officials and the referees together because if this is out of balance then we have problems.”



- PILOT PROJECTS

The FIFA Exchange Programme Pilot Project – Youth Football launched in Solomon Islands during the OFC U-16 Championship in September.

Organisers Jorge Diaz-Cindoncha Garcia and Philip Zimmerman are FIFA Youth Football and Grassroots Managers respectively.

The exchange side of the pilot involved bringing key people from different nations together, who have the same interest of wanting to make football in the whole region better, to share knowledge, experiences, best practices and also the difficulties they face in trying to achieve their football objectives.

“Within the region there is enough knowledge, there are good people working in the federations and they should be able to help each other,” Zimmerman said.

Key topics under discussion included youth development in specific nations and how FIFA has been able to assist with that development so far, and how it can further assist in future, player selection and talent identification, the importance of domestic youth competitions and the opportunity for future collaboration amongst Member Associations.

The OFC Technical Department was represented by Paul Toohey who said the opportunity to engage in healthy exchange, with the OFC U-16 Championship as the backdrop, was exciting for football development.

“Youth development is a big focus for OFC over the next cycle leading up to the FIFA World Cup in 2026, so it’s good to come to a country where football is a big passion,” he said.

Tonga Football Association was chosen alongside five other countries worldwide, to participate in a new FIFA Women’s Football Development Programme pilot. The project focuses on growing participation with a FIFA technical expert who will work with TFA, and the women’s football development officer in particular, on a regular basis to help make the pilot a success.

“Before rolling out our participation strategy globally, it is important that we carry out a successful pilot phase,” FIFA Chief Women’s Football Officer Sarai Bareman said.

“Tonga has a strong foundation favouring women’s football development and therefore has been identified as a high potential FIFA member in supporting this goal.



“FIFA’s new approach to women’s football development is to create tailor-made projects and this one in particular will support the specific needs of Tonga over an 18-month period.”

New Caledonia were earmarked to launch a FIFA pilot project as part of the FIFA Women’s Football Development Programme which would see 20 to 23 young female footballers join an elite academy based in Noumea. Once again, the pilot project is being introduced in just five nations worldwide.

Although announced in March 2018, much of the year was spent putting everything in place for the project to kick off at the start of the 2019 school year.

FCF President Steeve Laigle was excited about ushering in a new era for football in New Caledonia.

“We need to put in place structures which allow our best to work together with a quality coach, and to take part in high-level competitions.”

Overseeing the pilot on behalf of FIFA is Instructor for women’s football development Anne Noe of Belgium.

Captains of Today, Leaders of Tomorrow was held for the first time bringing together the captains of teams qualified for the FIFA U-20 Women’s World Cup, as well as a budding match official from each Confederation. The two-day workshop was held in Moscow during the opening few days of the FIFA World Cup™.

MEDIA / COMMUNICATIONS / TELEVISION



Following on from the success of the trial projects in 2017, OFC continued working closely with Netherlands-based football streaming platform MyCujoo. Having a dedicated platform for distributing live OFC match content proved to be something fans had been waiting on.

Coverage began with the OFC Champions League Qualifier in American Samoa in January, and continued with each following OFC competition throughout the year. Obviously, the interest peaks around live events but the statistics show fans are also returning to watch the content even after a competition has concluded. In 2018 the OFC channel on MyCujoo attracted over half a million users with the most attractive event the group stage of the annual OFC Champions League, followed by the knock-out stage.

In terms of the OFC website, the numbers increased significantly across the board in 2018 compared with the previous 12-month period. The number of users and sessions increased by over 1000 per cent, with the most significant change being a boost to the number of returning visitors.

Across the three key social media platforms – Facebook, Twitter and Instagram – the statistics also indicated growth in 2018. Once again, the peak periods pertain to OFC tournaments, but unlike MyCujoo the gap between event and non-event periods was less marked.

The most significant area of audience growth was on Instagram where the number of followers doubled compared with 2017. Overall, across the three platforms a 30 per cent increase in total followers was achieved. Impressions were down significantly on Twitter in 2018, Facebook was a minimal decrease while Instagram was again the leader with an increase of 8,000 per cent. Despite average decrease in impressions, engagement was up by an average of 14 per cent.

By far the most successful platform for sharing OFC activities and content remains Facebook, which is heavily utilised as a form of communication across Oceania. With just under 40,000 total followers, through Facebook OFC made an average of 12.5 million impressions during 2018 and was the largest source of traffic to oceaniafootball.com.



COMPETITIONS

The 2018 OFC competition calendar debuted in January with the OFC Champions League Qualifier in American Samoa and concluded in December with the final of the OFC Women's Nations Cup in New Caledonia.

Between these two events there was plenty to keep the OFC Competitions Department occupied, from organising the OFC U-16 and U-19 Championships in Tahiti and Solomon Islands, to assisting with the development of the Competitions and Clubs and Leagues sections of the Football Development Strategy as well as working with Competitions Managers across the region to support their continued learning and development.

In February, in support of professionalising clubs across Oceania and aligning both the clubs and Member Associations more closely to the Confederation, a COMET Cluster Workshop was held in Auckland, New Zealand.

The Competition Management Programme is run by Croatia-based company Analyticom and has been used by OFC for more than 12 months at beginning of 2018.

OFC Competitions Director Chris Kemp said the system has helped streamline and improve the processes used by the OFC when running its competitions and events.

"It's a system which is easy to operate and will help competition managers across the region to perform their roles," he said.

"This workshop has brought all of the Member Associations together in Auckland with the team from COMET to go through and help them start the process of setting up their databases."

Having a region-wide database is an important step for OFC and its Member Associations, especially given the fluidity and frequency with which players saw clubs domestically and within Oceania.

"When players are in teams in our regional competitions, for example the OFC Champions League, but are also playing in their national teams, age-group competitions and senior competitions, it makes the process a whole lot easier as we're not manually entering data every time.

"It's all coming through in a consistent format and from there we can also create accurate statistics on all the players and coaches. The system is great in that it can deal with everybody from a grassroots player through to someone playing in the OFC Champions League."

Fiji Football Association Competitions Manager said the competition management expert system has simplified things and reduced the workload in his association, which is important given the limited human resources available.

"The previous database registration process was a bit difficult as it involved a lot of work and considering the man power available in nations like Fiji, we don't have many people available to do it. As an expert system it covers all facets of football which involves all the stakeholders like the media department for example.

"They have their own account and whenever they need to, they can access the information required directly rather than having to make requests via email, which has saved us both a lot of time."

The Competitions Department continued to support their MA counterparts throughout 2018 as they advanced in the introduction of COMET in their respective federations.

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE QUALIFIER

20 - 27 January // American Samoa

Participating Teams
Lupe Ole Soaga (SAM) / Tupapa Maraerenga (COK) / Veitongo FC (TGA) / Pago Youth SC (ASA)

The opening match of this year’s qualifier featured clubs from Cook Islands and Samoa – the two nations who took the honour of qualifying for the Group Stage of the OFC Champions League in 2017.

The honour of opening points fell to Tupapa Maraerenga, the club champions from Cook Islands, who defeated Lupe Ole Soaga of Samoa 1-0. The clubs from American Samoa and Tonga meanwhile shared opening points after a 1-1 draw.

Following a massive 9-2 victory over Veitongo of Tonga on Match Day 2, Tupapa secured their first appearance in the OFC Champions League group stage since 2001. Lupe got their campaign back on track with a 13-1 win over Pago Youth. Ahead of the third and final match day, Veitongo were still in with a chance to qualify provided they could beat Lupe Ole Soaga. However, after leading striker Soakai Vea and captain Sioni Uhatahi received red cards in their second match, the task proved much harder than it might have in normal circumstances. Despite a relatively good start from both sides, the experienced Lupe side soon prevailed and with a 6-0 win joined qualifier winners Tupapa in the group stage.



GROUP A

10 - 16 February // Port Vila, Vanuatu

Participating Teams
Ba FC (FIJ) / Tupapa Maraerenga (COK) / Lae City Dwellers FC (PNG) / Nalkutan FC (VAN)

Making their return to the Group Stage for the first time since 2001 was memorable for Tupapa Maraerenga, but not entirely in the manner they would have liked after they fell to a 7-2 opening defeat to Papua New Guinea champions Lae City Dwellers. Tournament debutants and hosts Nalkutan FC made history with their opening match after a narrow 1-0 win over Fiji side Ba.

By the end of Match Day 2, Korman Stadium had found its top two sides after Nalkutan notched a 4-0 win over Tupapa Maraerenga and Lae beat Ba 1-0. The final day was required just to determine who would top the group and secure the home quarter-final, the honour falling to first-timers Nalkutan FC after an impressive second half performance saw them overcome the favoured Lae City Dwellers 4-1.



GROUP B

11 - 17 February / Papeete, Tahiti

Participating Teams
AS Lössi (NCL) / Erakor Golden Star FC (VAN) / Solomon Warriors (SOL) / AS Dragon (TAH)

Group B featured four clubs who had never progressed past the Group Stage of the OFC Champions League previously, with each of them more than capable of making history this time around.

The opening encounters saw both Solomon Warriors and AS Lössi finish their matches with just 10 men. Lössi lost defender Warren Saiko just 20 minutes in after a foul on AS Dragon captain Tamatoa Teataura, while Solomon Warriors lost goalkeeper Abraham Bird after a colossal mistake led to him handing the ball outside the area in the 63rd minute.

For Erakor, it meant an eventual 2-0 victory while Dragon prevailed 4-0. The group leaders Dragon and Erakor met on Match Day 2 at Stade Pater with each hoping to edge a little closer to that quarter-final berth. The match of the round was definitely that between these two sides with the lead changing hand three times during a pulsating

clash, and victory looking likely for the Vanuatu club until a second yellow to central defender Joseph Iaruel forced them down to ten men for the final 15 minutes, giving Dragon captain Teataura the space he needed to score twice in injury time to claim a 4-3 victory. Solomon Warriors got their campaign back on track after an opening loss, with a 6-1 win over Lössi.

The final match day proved crucial for deciding the top two in the standings and after Erakor were held to a 2-2 draw by a revitalised Lössi it came down to Solomon Warriors and Dragon to determine who would be heading into the quarter-finals. A lively final match was won by Solomon Warriors 2-1, but the result meant both went through to the quarter-finals with Dragon securing the home advantage courtesy of a lone goal after being tied on points and goal difference with the Solomon Islands champion.

GROUP C

25 February – 3 March // Auckland, New Zealand

Participating Teams

Madang FC (PNG) / AS Venus (TAH) /
Auckland City FC (NZL) / Lautoka FC (FIJ)

Defending champions Auckland City FC started their campaign as they intended to continue with a 7-0 victory over AS Venus, while Lautoka FC of Fiji also made a good start beating Madang FC of Papua New Guinea 2-1. With wins for both sides on the second day of action, they both secured passage to the quarterfinals, although it took an injury-time winner from Samuela Drudru to ensure the 2-1 win. Deciding the group winner would come down to the final match between Auckland City and Lautoka, and following a narrow 1-0 victory it was the defending champions who confirmed the home quarter-final. Venus avoided the bottom of the table after beating Madang 2-1 on Match Day 3.



GROUP D

24 February – 2 March // Honiara, Solomon Islands

Participating Teams

AS Magenta (NCL) / Lupe Ole Soaga (SAM) /
Marist FC (SOL) / Team Wellington (NZL)

Magenta opened their campaign with a 2-0 win over Qualifier runners-up Lupe Ole Soaga but it was the match-up between hosts Marist and New Zealand side Team Wellington which proved the showcase. In front of 12,000 vocal fans Abraham Iniga put the local side ahead and it took almost the entire match for the favourites to finally find the equaliser the desired.

The final match day at Lawson Tama saw Team Wellington and Magenta go into their final matches locked on points following a win and a draw a piece, while Marist had just two points from two matches. However, three-time finalists Team Wellington completely outplayed their opponent winning 5-1 to take the advantage, and when Marist beat Lupe 3-1 it meant they leap-frogged the New Caledonia club to join the Kiwis in the quarter-finals.



Quarter-Finals

24 February – 2 March // Honiara, Solomon Islands

Participating Teams

Team Wellington (NZL) vs Lae City Dwellers FC (PNG)
David Farrington Park / Wellington, New Zealand

Nalkutan FC (VAN) vs. Marist FC (SOL)
Korman Stadium / Port Vila, Vanuatu

Auckland City FC (NZL) vs. Solomon Warriors (SOL)
Kiwitea Street / Auckland, New Zealand

AS Dragon (TAH) vs. Lautoka FC (FIJ)
Stade Pater / Papeete, Tahiti

Team Wellington were the first to progress to the semi-finals after a complete dismantling of Papua New Guinea champions Lae City Dwellers at David Farrington Park in Wellington. The 11-0 victory was a completely comprehensive one for the host side whose opponents never quite managed to adjust to the cold conditions or the manner with which Wellington stretched the defence and exploited the space it created.

Marist FC of Solomon Islands made history when they squeezed past Vanuatu side Naltokan FC 2-1 at Korman Stadium in Port Vila. The match was difficult to call with both sides playing some superb football, and the club from Tanna looking most likely to open the scoring. However, goals to the experienced Abraham Iniga and youngster Davidson Tome denied history on home soil for Nalkutan.

Goals early in both halves of the match were all Auckland City needed to secure their place in the semi-finals once more, however Solomon Warriors made it far from easy work for the defending Oceania champions. In the first half especially, Warriors really tested their opponent however it wasn't to be with Emiliano Tade's first half strike added to by Solomon Islands striker Micah Lea'alafa to set-up an all-Kiwi semi-final against Team Wellington.

In Papeete, a late header from Lautoka FC defender Brian Kaltack was the difference as the Fijian side beat AS Dragon 2-1 to become the first Fijian team to feature in the semi-finals since 2015. It was tough going for both sides with so much on the line but a promising campaign from the home side was cut short with the winner from Kaltack coming too late in the match for Dragon to respond.

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

SEMI-FINALS



Participating Teams - Semi Final 1

Team Wellington (NZL) vs. Auckland City FC (NZL)
22 April / David Farrington Park / Wellington, New Zealand

Auckland City FC (NZL) vs. Team Wellington (NZL)
29 April / Kiwitea Steet / Auckland, New Zealand

The semi-finals of the 2018 OFC Champions League were played over two legs with the first match between the competition finalists of the past three years running opening the semi-finals in Wellington. Team Wellington, who have so often fallen at the hands of their Auckland City rivals were determined not to let that happen for a fourth year running. The first 90 minutes showed Wellington to once more be impossible to penetrate at the fortress of Dave Farrington in this competition as the two sides were locked in a scoreless draw. The second leg however, despite once more being a draw, was all Wellington needed to end an incredibly run by the defending champions. With a 2-2 draw at Kiwitea Street the away-goals rule saw Team Wellington through to the first final of the OFC Champions League where their opponent wouldn't be Auckland City.

Participating Teams - Semi Final 2

Lautoka FC (FIJ) vs. Marist FC (SOL)
22 April / Churchill Park / Lautoka, Fiji

Marist FC (SOL) vs. Lautoka FC (FIJ)
29 April / Lawson Tama Stadium / Honiara, Solomon Islands

The second semi-final in Fiji was also a draw in the first leg, with Lautoka and Marist locked at 1-1 at Churchill Park. This put all the pressure on Lautoka for the second leg with Marist having picked up an all-important away goal. Marist largely dominated the first half putting Lautoka's backline under pressure which was coped with well by the central pairing of Brian Kaltack and Kolinio Sivoki, with goalkeeper Beniamino Mateinaqara putting in a stunning performance. In the end, it took just a lone goal to put Lautoka through to their first-ever OFC Champions League final, a Praneel Naidu strike securing the victory.

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FINALS



Participating Teams

Team Wellington (NZL) vs. Lautoka FC (FIJ)
13 May / David Farrington Park / Wellington, New Zealand

Lautoka FC (FIJ) vs. Team Wellington (NZL)
20 May / Churchill Park / Lautoka, Fiji

An historic two-legged final promised football fans so much, but with Leg 1 being held in Team Wellington's fortress in Miramar it was going to be a tough task for the Fijian club. Although the desire was victory, if Lautoka could at least keep their opponent at bay for 90 minutes they could rely on home advantage of their own for the second leg. But it's never as simple as that and like so many Pacific Island teams before them the conditions in Wellington proved too difficult to overcome. When combined with a clinical performance from their hosts, Lautoka was faced with a 6-0 defeat and a lot of work to do at home for Leg 2.

With a six-goal deficit to overcome it seemed like an impossible task for Lautoka but they dug in and gave it their all nonetheless. The first bump came just ten minutes in when Dave Radrigai gave Wellington the lead through an own goal. Early in the second half Team Wellington were already three goals up. Three quick goals for Lautoka, including a brace for Benjamin Totori the competition's leading goalscorer, saw the Fijian side equalise. However when Angus Kilkolly netted the winner in the 88th minute Team Wellington confirmed their historic victory with a 10-3 aggregate win across two legs to become Oceania champions for the first time.

FIFA Club World Cup

OFC U-19 Championship

Qualifier

26 May-1 June // Cook Islands

Two wins from two matches at the OFC U-19 Championship Qualifier for Tonga and Samoa set the two sides up for a final showdown on the last match day of the competition in Rarotonga. Tonga saw off Cook Islands 3-0 and American Samoa 2-0, Samoa didn't concede in either of their opening matches either, with a 3-0 win over American Samoa followed by a tight 1-0 victory over their hosts.

In the end it proved to be Tonga's moment in the sun as the side's 1-1 draw with Samoa proved enough to win the qualifier tournament – a first-ever achievement for the Pacific nation.



Finals

5 - 18 August // Tahiti

New Zealand opened the defence of their U-19 Championship title with a decent 2-1 victory over a lively Tahiti, continuing their way through Group A with a massive 14-0 win over Tonga and finishing with a 4-0 victory over Papua New Guinea to top the standings. After losing their opening match, Tahiti rebounded well to secure a 6-0 win over Papua New Guinea followed by a 2-0 win over Tonga to join the Kiwis in the semi-finals.

In Group B Solomon Islands and Fiji took first blood with the former beating a well-organised New Caledonia side 3-2 while the latter went 3-1 up over Vanuatu. New Caledonia rebounded well from the defeat, winning 8-1 against Vanuatu and drawing 1-1 with Fiji to ensure their place in the semi-finals. Solomon Islands topped the group with the full nine points after a 1-0 win over Fiji and Vanuatu respectively.

With two berths available at the FIFA U-20 World Cup for Oceania, the semi-finals of the qualifying tournament take on greater significance than normal. Defending champions New Zealand, as Group A winners, took on New Caledonia while Group B winners Solomon Islands met hosts Tahiti.

Tahiti got the desired return to the FIFA U-20 World Cup after a ten year wait, when they defeated Solomon Islands 3-1 following a fantastic performance from both sides. The lead came just ahead of the break when Tahiti captain Roonui Tehau headed home. Rainui Nordman and Eddy Kaspard ensured the victory would be Tahiti's with two strikes in the space of our minutes late in the second

half. A consolation goal came for Solomon Islands via Ali Mekawir but it was the Tahitians celebrating at the final whistle.

In the other semi-final New Caledonia showed their desire to return to a FIFA youth tournament with a spirited performance which saw them take the lead against their much favoured opponents. Going in front through a Max Mata own goal, New Caledonia had the advantage, but much like two years earlier in the semi-final of the same competition against the same opponent, they allowed New Zealand to come from behind and not only equalise but snatch the victory from their grasp.

New Caledonia were able to avenge their group stage loss to Solomon Islands when the two sides met in the Third Place Play-off. The Francophone side earning a 4-1 victory and with it the podium finish.

The final was an incredible display of determination from the hosts Tahiti as they aimed to unseat New Zealand from the throne they've sat on for six consecutive qualifiers. While New Zealand were the dominant side, they were unable to find the back of the net. The second half the Kiwis came out more determined than ever to defend the title and the defining moment came when Matthew Conroy ran down the right before pulling back an inch-perfect cross for an arriving Trevor Zwetsloot to smash past the goalkeeper Moana Pito. A lone goal was all it took for New Zealand to secure its seventh OFC U-16 Championship title.

OFC U-16 Championship

Qualifier

14 - 20 July // Tonga

Samoa made their intentions clear from the beginning of the Qualifier, maintaining their killer form from start to finish as they claimed their place in the Finals of the OFC U-16 Championship. The opening 3-0 win against Cook Islands was followed by a massive 10-3 victory over American Samoa before they rounded out the tournament with another big win, this time 9-0 over Tonga. With the full nine points and plenty of goals under their belts, Samoa progressed to the Finals ready to make their case at the next level.



Finals

9-22 September // Solomon Islands

Playing the OFC U-16 Championship at the hallowed Lawson Tama Stadium guaranteed the stands would be full of football devotees.

The competition got underway with New Zealand winning big with an 8-0 against Vanuatu, while hosts Solomon Islands also made a strong start notching a 5-0 win over Papua New Guinea. It was Match Day 2 of Group A that really turned heads however, as New Zealand were outplayed and outpowered by an impressive home side which emerged 5-0 victors against the tournament favourites. Solomon Islands rounded out the group with a third 5-0 win this time over Vanuatu, while a wounded New Zealand were almost overcome by Papua New Guinea, just narrowly avoiding defeat with a 4-3 win.

In Group B things were a little less clear-cut with the margins of victory much narrower. Samoa almost caused an upset in their opening match of the Finals after coming through the Qualifier before eventually going down 3-2 to Fiji. Tahiti and New Caledonia played out a great match with the Polynesians eventually taking the 201 win. Tahiti continued their winning ways by downing Fiji 3-0 while Samoa's impressive form also continued this time managing to hold New Caledonia to a 1-1 draw. Fiji's 1-0 win over New Caledonia secured their passage to the semi-finals, while Tahiti beat Samoa 5-1 to ensure they topped the group.

New Zealand and Solomon Islands secured passage to the FIFA U-17 World Cup with relative ease all things considered as both sides won their respective semi-finals. With huge desire and the side that has what it would take to turn a nation's dream into a reality, Solomon Islands wasted not even a minute in putting their plan into action. Just 45 seconds after kick-off Charles Mani slotted a low drive past the Fijian keeper Isikela Sevanaia to open the scoring. It wasn't the first and it wouldn't be the last as Fiji focused on trying to mark leading scorer Raphael Le'ai out of the match, giving Mani free reign to roam the penalty area and he soon had a brace. Not to be outdone, Le'ai made sure to add one of his own – his eighth of the tournament. Fiji pulled one back but it wasn't enough to stop the Solomon Islands from securing history on home soil.

New Zealand secured a sixth consecutive appearance at the FIFA U-17 World Cup with their 4-1 win over Tahiti. Like the other semi-final, the opening goal came early on in the piece with Oskar Van Hattum putting his side ahead just two minutes in. A sense of comfort came when Henry Hamilton scored twice in ten minutes. In the second half Tekaki Sangu put Tahiti on the board when he slotted under a diving Luca Taylor, but the response from the Kiwis was swift as they were awarded a penalty which Matt Garbett slotted home to put his side out of reach of their opponents.

A rematch of the Group A match between Solomon Islands and New Zealand in the final meant fans were assured of an entertaining encounter. After being completely unstitched by their hosts in the group game New Zealand would be relying on tactical nous to prevent a similar fate. While both side had some reasonable chances it soon became apparent it would be difficult to separate these two sides. When Raphael Le'ai was brought down in the penalty area inside additional time it seemed almost certain Solomon Islands would be lifting the trophy, however New Zealand goalkeeper Alex Paulsen had other ideas, stopping the penalty and denying the winner. At the final whistle the game went to a penalty shootout where Paulsen continued to show incredible form which saw him halt the effort from Derick Taebo which was enough for New Zealand to retain their crown and earn a sixth straight OFC U-16 Championship title.



FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup

5 - 24 August // France

After winning the OFC U-19 Women's Championship in Auckland, New Zealand in 2017, New Zealand went on to represent Oceania at the FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup in France.

Drawn into Group A alongside the hosts France, the Netherlands and Ghana, Gareth Turnbull's side knew they were in for a tough run if they were to exit the group stage.

The opening match saw them take on Netherlands and it seemed possible given the balanced second half, that New Zealand could get an historic victory after Hannah Blake scored the equaliser just before the break. However, a goal from Eva van Deursen in the 78th minute restored the Netherlands lead and the Kiwis were unable to get a second much-desired equaliser.

Next up were the hosts and given the rich development of women's football in France it was expected to be one of the tougher of the three matches. Much to the frustration of the home side the teams remained scoreless when the final whistle sounded earning New Zealand a share of the points.

The final group game saw New Zealand take on Ghana and after a goalless first half victory remained a possibility for the Kiwis, who need a win to reach the quarter-finals. Though they created chances, they went unfinished and eventually with 15 minutes on the clock it was Ghana who struck the winner.

Youth Olympic Futsal Tournament – Men

7 - 19 October // Buenos Aires, Argentina

Having dominated the qualifying tournament, and given the legendary status of futsal in Solomon Islands, there were high hopes for the youth team as they made their first appearance at the Youth Olympic Games in Argentina.

Drawn in Group B alongside some tough opponents it was always going to be tough to make an impression given the calibre and development of futsal across the globe. The opening match saw the Oceania side take on Iran which resulted in a 9-2 loss. Next up were Costa Rica and although they came close to matching the South Americans goal for goal, Solomon Islands found themselves trailing 6-3 at the break. The second half gave Costa Rica a chance to assert further dominance and they extended that lead to 11-6 by the final whistle.

Match 2 proved another tough one for the young Oceania side with Russia prevailing 10-4, against Brazil it was another loss this time going down 9-1 and unfortunately going home without any points.



Youth Olympic Futsal Tournament – Women

7 - 17 October // Buenos Aires, Argentina

With New Zealand unable to take their place in Argentina despite winning the qualifier, it fell to runners-up Tonga to take their place in Group B.

The side, at their first international tournament outside Oceania, weren't as out of place as some may have expected. The opening match against Bolivia was a quick introduction to the level Tonga could expect, and after conceding the first goal they hit back quick through captain Seini Lutu. But Bolivia had experience over their opponent and with Maria Galvez notching four goals Tonga were downed 7-2. Match 2 was a little more positive for Tonga as they took a two goal lead against Trinidad and Tobago, which also led to them being 2-1 up at the break. Trinidad and Tobago came back strong in the second half and despite Tonga scoring a record five goals, they were outdone by their opponents' seven. Unfortunately for Tonga the remaining two matches were also heavy losses – 8-0 against Spain and 9-1 against Thailand – meaning they finished bottom of the group.





FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup

13 November - 1 December // Uruguay

New Zealand opened their campaign in Uruguay in the best possible manner, a 1-0 victory over Finland to put three points on the board from the outset. They followed that up with a 2-1 win over the hosts which helped secure their exit from Group A. After a final group loss to eventual table toppers Ghana, New Zealand were confirmed as second in the standings and through to the quarter-final.

After keeping Japan contained to a 1-1 draw at the final whistle, Leon Birnie's inspirational side went on to win the penalty shootout 4-3 and secure a place in the semi-final. Spain were up next and although the Kiwis almost scored the opening just ahead of the half-hour mark, in the end the European nation proved too tough a task with

New Zealand falling 2-0. All was not over however with the next encounter against Canada a chance to secure an historic podium finish. It turned out the side weren't content with making history with a win, but instead went all out to make it a memorable performance all around. Grace Wisnewski kicked things off when she scored the fastest goal in U-17 Women's World Cup history with just 15 seconds on the clock. She doubled the lead 12 minutes later with a fine volley from about 20 yards out. Canada gave their all to try and pull themselves back in line after getting their first in the 64th minute, however the New Zealanders held on to get the result and claim the bronze medal.



FIFA Club World Cup

12-22 December // UAE

After ending Auckland City's historic run of consecutive regional titles, Team Wellington were ready to make further history when they debuted at the FIFA Club World Cup in Al Ain City, UAE.

If the first half against Al Ain was anything to go by, it certainly appeared as if the club from New Zealand's capital would be leaving a mark on the competition after taking an impressive three goal lead.

Mario Barcia scored the opening in just the 11th minute in quite emphatic fashion with a superb long-range strike which found the top corner. Four minutes later the lead doubled when Andy Bevin played in Aaron Clapham who coolly slotted into the bottom corner. It was then three

when an unmarked Mario Illich tapped in from close range off a Henry Cameron corner.

The hosts grabbed one back just ahead of the break and when they came back out for the second half, the professional club upped the ante on their amateur opponents.

The eventually got their equaliser in the 85th minute to take the game into extra time. When the two couldn't be separated still, it headed to a penalty shootout. It proved a heart-breaking end to what came close to being a dream debut, as Justin Gulley's penalty was saved seeing Al Ain FC win 4-3 on penalties.

