

NEIL MACFARLANE (MINISTER FOR SPORT)

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PRESENTER: Two former Sports Ministers - one Labour, one Conservative - have called on Footlab's international ruling body, FIFA, to ban Argentina from the World Cup unless it withdraws from the Falklands. But the present Sports Minister, Mr Neil Macfarlane, made it clear in the Commons that the Government has no plans at present to stop any United Kingdom team from taking part in the Finals even though they might find themselves playing against Argentina, the Cup holders. Mr Macfarlane explained to John Spicer what Government policy was on sporting contacts with Argentina.

MACFARLANE: I have urged, in recent days, the severance of sporting links with Argentina, both in this country and in Argentina, and I've said to the various governing bodies, and to the Sports Council, that they should now stop any fixtures or matches which they have planned and make certain that those sporting bodies in Argentina realise that they're not welcome to play sport here and that we shall not be sending teams to play in Argentina. At the same time, of course, we shall be withdrawing any grant aid to any of the bodies who would be anticipating having any sporting contacts with Argentina, again either in Argentina or here in the United Kingdom. The second aspect is, of course, that over the next few months, there are a number of sporting engagements between a number of Nations on various sports outside the United Kingdom but involving both Argentinian teams and United Kingdom teams and at the moment the Government don't feel that it is right to interfere with those particular schedules.

SPICER: Just before we go on to that can we get one thing straight? Individuals will be allowed here will they - like Tennis players at Wimbledon and motor racing drivers?

MACFARLANE: Well because of the severence of diplomatic relations between the 2 Nations this does, of course, throw wide open the entire vesa arrangements now and, of course, vesas take a long time so there will, undoubtedly, be some disruption to Argentinians wanting to come and play sport, as individuals, here.

SPICER: Is that possible, then, that we won't see any Argentinian players at Wimbledon

MACFARLANE: It's quite possible, anything is possible, but at the moment all these things are under constant review by the Government and it's difficult to say just how many Argentinians will want to come now to play Golf or Tennis or other individual sports here. But the vesa arrangements will now prevail and, of course, they do take a great deal of time to process.

SPICER: Now obviously, the big sporting event that is coming and is in everyone's mind is the World Cup in Spain. What's our position there? You're obviously not banning the England, Scotland and Northern Ireland teams from going?

MACFARLANE: Oh I think it would be strange in the minds of millions of people in this country and most Members of the House of Commons - in fact all Members of the House of Commons, myself included - would find it very strange, I think to represent our country in the House of Commons and suggest that our teams shouldn't go and participate when we've worked hard for 4 years to get 3 teams there. To say ~~that~~ we're not going there because of the act of another aggressive Nation. And, therefore, there has been a mood in the House of Commons, today, which is urging FIFA to stop Argentina from coming to the World Cup. That is the view of a number of Members of the House of Commons. Now the World Cup is 6, 7, 8 weeks away now - we're talking about June 14 or 15 for kick-off, and the first match

is Argentina verses Belgium, Argentina as the holders have right of the first match - but I think that, in the meantime, they will come to realise that opinion amongst many people in this country is that they shouldn't participate. Now that is not the view, at the moment, of the Government. The Government believes that the governing international body have got to assemble and decide for themselves just how they should react. But I very much hope that our teams will be going there.

SPICER: Will you be contacting FIFA to suggest to them, in any terms possible, that they shouldn't have the Argentines

MACFARLANE: I've had contact with the Football representatives in this country but I don't sit on FIFA and I don't sit on EUEFA who is very much a matter for the Football Authorities. But I've had contact with the various representatives of Football in this country but, at the moment, it is very much a matter for the governing body.

SPICER: But that's passing the buck, really, isn't it? Asking them, because we're got a row with another competing team, to take action?

MACFARLANE: No I don't think it is passing the buck because it's very difficult to speculate what's going to happen in a few weeks and, as I said a few moments ago, the World Cup is still many, many weeks away; many things can happen but in the meantime I imagine that the various Footballing Authorities are watching the international situation closely. But we are keeping the matter closely under review - constantly under review - and, at the moment, I'm not prepared to say anything more at this stage.

SPICER: Can you foresee things like us lining up, on the opening day standing to attention while the Argentinian flag is raised and their National Anthem is being played?

MACFARLANE: I think a great deal depends on what happens over the next few weeks because, at the moment, where the multi-lateral sporting activities are taking place elsewhere in the world with British and Argentinian teams participating, HMG don't believe that there's any reason to intervene at the moment. But we are watching the situation closely. When you ask me what I can foresee, a lot of politicians like to speculate about the future but this is such a difficult situation for everyone and I certainly wouldn't want to make any prophesies at all.