

## ESFNA Held its 31<sup>st</sup> Tournament at FIFA Legalized Field

By LJD

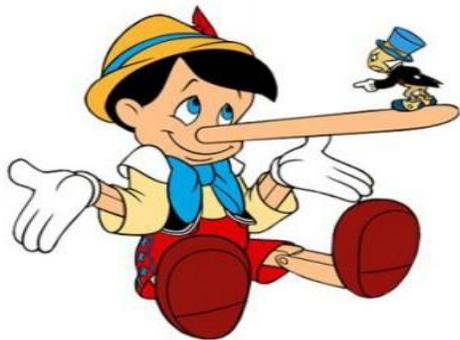
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“A good leader can engage in a debate frankly and thoroughly, knowing that at the end he and the other side must be closer, and thus emerge stronger. You don't have that idea when you are arrogant, superficial, and uninformed” said Nelson Mandela, the late anti-apartheid icon.

On an American football (football) field, the ESFNA held its 31<sup>st</sup> soccer tournament at San Jose City College (SJCC), San Jose, California. According to Wikipedia, “during the 1970s, SJCC was a major training hub for Olympic Track and Field athletes.” However, it is unheard of that SJCC's football field was able to become an elite soccer field – which “FIFA legalized” – until president Getachew Tesfaye, claimed it be so [in a press conference](#) (PC) that he gave at the Hyatt Regency, Santa Clara, California on July 2014. At the PC, the federation's guests of honor were present, among others. The honorees were Captain Guta Dinka, the late Mandela bodyguard that declined an offer to assassinate him, Coach Sewnet Bishaw, former Ethiopian men's soccer national team head coach and Solomon Shiferaw, former Ethiopian national team forward footballer.

### We all Deserve to be Told the Truth

This article may not matter for president Tesfaye and company as the rest of the articles I shared with the federation did not matter to them. However, I opted to write because he made it clear in



his PC that he is not persuadable and not suggestible. To block change how the federation is run, he denied its problems on camera because he wanted to keep it going his own way – which is non-transparent and non-accountable. He vividly proved that no one would challenge his outright self-serving fish stories, including ESAT. He lied through his teeth with a straight face on tape while sited next to national heroes such as Capitan Dinka, which was unacceptable and offensive to those

who have feelings of pride in their heroes. He also successfully continued to tell self-serving lies despite the facts right in front of us. In the PC, he told us that the 31<sup>st</sup> tournament was held at a FIFA legalized field. On Addis Dimts radio, he told us last year that he was one of the founders of the federation.

With great interest, I watched on ESAT the press conference Tesfaye gave. I analyzed some of his claims and assigned truth-values to them. I measured the truth-values of his claims on the *Liar-O-Meter* – which I created based on an idea I borrowed from [PolitiFact](#) and ruled on them: *Partially-Lies, Mostly-Lies or Pants-on-fire.*

## Rulings on Tesfaye's Undetected False Claims

ESAT's Anchors and the federation's board member asked president Tesfaye nerve-racking questions; however, they all let him escape undetected with deception, intimidation and lies.

**Tesfaye's Claim:** It has been a few years since the ESFNA started to make its internal operations transparent with the public. This press conference is part of that effort, [starting at 0:00 minutes on the PC video](#).

**Liar-O-Meter ruling:** It is my understanding that Tesfaye's administration is advised to keep the federation's internal operations non-transparent. As a result, he became the most secretive president ever, and in turn, the Executive Committee (EC). During his term, the EC turned from bad to ugly. It alienated the board, and it fostered enmity in the processes. It disregarded the bylaws and became an "autonomous mini-board." The claim is outrageously false. | **Liar-O-Meter "rates the claim Pants on Fire."**



**Question:** I observed *unsporting conduct and maybe behavior that was an unbecoming for an Ethiopian. Some board members (BMs) took unmannered actions. I noticed that they did not participate in the opening ceremony. Does the board know what instigated their acts? What kind of responsibilities the board would take for things that might happen after this because they might create problems among the Ethiopian people?* *ESAT's Reporter Mahlet Abera asked, starting at 23:50 minutes on the PC video.*

**Answer:** Tesfaye said that it was a great question. However, it is difficult to answer it right now because it is a new thing for us. We identified the clubs and the BMs that took the action. We would do something to make sure that things like this will not happen again, especially this kind of disgusting act such as not receiving invited guests. Yes, certainly, it was an unbecoming Ethiopian. The BMs and the clubs who took this measure are responsible for their action. Usually, we address this kind of situation in our October meeting. Several BMs discussed this plight during the tournament. The EC alone would not handle this problem. The board would handle it. This is strange for us.

I take this opportunity to apologize for those who were disappointed by this incident. We have been in business for 31 years, but we had no problem that required this kind of action. Even now, we do not have a problem that would necessitate this sort of measure. I believe the board along with the people would hold them accountable.

**Liar-O-Meter ruling:** ESAT's Reporter Abera remarks made her sounded like a state journalist. On another note, in several articles, this commentator articulated the federation's problems and provided solutions. The federation has been engulfed with problems for years. Tesfaye's claim

that it does not have a problem that necessitated the clubs measure is a denial. His assertions at their best are intended to intimidate, to misinform and to deceive. At their worst, they are wished-for to be denial. | **Liar-O-Meter “rules the claim Pants on Fire.”**

As a side note, although ESAT and president Tesfaye condemned the protesters act, I tipped my hat to them because I was proud of their protest. To explain, in 1968 Mexico Olympics, “**Teammates at San Jose State University, Smith and Carlos**, two black American athletes have made history at the Mexico Olympics by staging a silent protest against racial discrimination. As they left the podium at the end of the ceremony, they were booed by many in the crowd. At a press conference after the event Tommie Smith, who holds seven world records, said: "If I win I am an American, not a black American. But if I did something bad then they would say 'a Negro'. "Black America will understand what we did tonight." “In 2005, San Jose State University **honored former students Smith and Carlos with a 22-foot high statue** of their protest.”

***Question:** Why the federation cannot negotiate deals with various airlines and hotels in various cities years in advance so that its guests could get better deals? **ESAT’s Reporter Mahlet Abera asked Tesfaye starting at 29:56 minutes on the PC video***

**Answer:** Getting contracts signed with hotels/airlines years in advance is difficult.

**Liar-O-Meter ruling:** I agree with the president’s claim. To get contract signed with hotels and airlines for major events years in advance is complicated. And it requires a large amount of money, which the federation is short of mainly because of rumored inadequate box office receipts controls. However, on balance, the president lied by omission because he concealed facts from the public. To explain, the federation is rumored that some hotels do not want repeat business from it because it does not leave behind a positive experience. For example, it is my understanding that Hyatt Regency, Santa Clara, California alleged that the federation’s 2014 guests vandalized its property. His claim about the difficulty of getting hotel/airline contract signed in advance is true. But, his response was filled with omission. | **For that, Liar-O-Meter “rules the claim Pants on Fire.”**

***Questions:** Gilardi, a board member of the federation, and a former national team footballer, starting at 50:05 minutes on the PC video said, I like to thank the PC organizing team because having a PC is great. I heard all of you here speaking. I share your concerns that our federation is not in good shape. But, we all need to put it in a better condition. To get our federation on the right track, I believe this kind of discussion with the press would help us to change our federation’s situation.... So I like to thank the PC organizing team. My questions are for our president Getachew. Our federation has problems, and now the people started learning about its problem. First, I like to know what you did to solve the situation and to bring unity among us.*

*Second, there are some recurring problems in our tournament. One of the problems is the condition of our playing field. Most players complain about it. They whine regarding the field’s playability and the referees. We argue about these problems year after year. Unless the referees*

*are good and the playing field is suitable for the game, the players do not get what they want, and they do not enjoy the game. Although I asked about these situations last year, we still have the same problems. How did you see these situations?*

**Answer:** I thank you Rico. I would be answering these questions for the second time for you. You asked these questions in a board meeting. Especially we discussed about the referees and the playing field in the board meeting. To respond and to discuss about them again is good. About what I did to bring unity, we have records to prove that. We had teleconferences. Several attempts were made during board meeting. But “አጫቆ የተኛን ሰጧ ሲቀሰቅሱት አይነቃም ነጧ የሚባለጧ” we have major problems on that. During this tournament, we saw a disgusting gesture was committed and a situation is created which embarrassed our spectators and us. To see how to bring these things together, we would discuss about them in our October board meeting.

**Liar-O-Meter ruling:** Without elaborating on the efforts he made to bring unity among the BMs, claiming that teleconferences were held and attempts were made during a board meeting was a non-answer. It is documented that he disregarded the bylaws, alienated the board, became an “autonomous mini-board”, and fostered enmity in the processes. He used the old Ethiopian proverb “አጫቆ የተኛን ሰጧ ሲቀሰቅሱት አይነቃም” to lead up to the boycott and to deceive, intimidate, and humiliate the inquirer. | **Liar-O-Meter “rates the claims Pants on Fire.”**

**Answer:** Regarding complaint about the playing field, president Tesfaye said that football field size is the same all over. This field is legal by FIFA. The second field is prepared for a soccer tournament so it looks like a soccer field. The main field is a football field but it looks different because it has soccer field markings on it. But it is legalized by FIFA. The EC did not do anything against FIFA’s requirements regarding the field. Its appearance might be different.

**Liar-O-Meter ruling:** Imagine for a moment that FIFA legalizing an American football field often. Then think about Tesfaye’s claim that the SJCC American football field is FIFA legalized. It was a fish tale intended to make the inquirer, Rico *Gilardi*, inadequate. His false clam also showed his lack of empathy for the players’ complaints. The players hated playing on the field because it was dangerous, and it sucked. I believe Tesfaye endangered their welfare and exposed the federation to potential liabilities. For example, I heard that one person sustained major injury. He tore his knee muscles. Worst yet, he was unable to get attention either from the insurance company or from the EC. | **Liar-O-Meter “rules the claim Pants on Fire.”**

I took offense at his fish story because it was disrespect for his honorees – Ethiopians’ national prides – among other, Captain Dinka. Having said that, Tesfaye’s false claims created the climactic moment of the PC; he let Gilardi squarely proved his case on camera against him that the federation is in bad shape. It is in the wrong hands. Tesfaye’s claim begs the question that why Coach Bishaw did not notice his false claim? Cannot he tell a field might not be FIFA legalized just by looking?

## How Tesfaye Risked the Players and the Federation Wellbeing

In theory, a soccer field, dimensions, slope, natural/artificial grass color, out of bound areas must meet industry specifications. For instance, a soccer field slope is significantly less than an American football field slope. A football field turf might have different colors; a soccer field natural/artificial grass color is supposed to be one, which is green. By the way, I do not hold the federation against FIFAS's "laws of the game" because a number of its clubs are a makeshift clubs. It cannot afford to handpick a playing field and referees. And it uses soccer as an excuse to bring people together. However, Tesfaye's claim that the SJCC field is FIFA legalized, and the 31<sup>st</sup> tournament was officiated by the "laws of the game" raises the question.

I argue that his claim is a fish tale because the SJCC football field is not FIFA legalized. I also argue that he endangered the players' safety and exposed the federation to liability by calming that the SJCC field was FIFA legalized and the game was officiated by the "laws of the game." According to Google Earth, the SJCC field dimensions are 92-meter long by 45-meter wide, which are not "within the range found optimal by FIFA (100-110 m) long by (64-73 m) wide." Its artificial grass has three colors: green, white and purple. It is inside a running track. In other words, the field boundaries are a running track. For football, it has about five feet white artificial grassed out of bounds area. However, it does not have grassed out of bounds area for soccer. For soccer, the field's out of bounds area is the track, which is too dangerous.

**Why the Players Hated the Field?** They hated it because they were required to play on unsafe

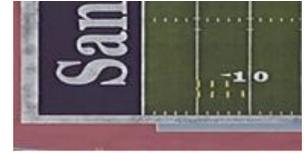


Turfed Fall out with Corner-Kick Preparation Area



Corner-Kick Preparation Area

field. "The field did not provide cushioning for falls." If a player gets tumble or trip by another player, he falls onto the track and could sustain injury. The field's slope is too high. By comparison, a soccer ball behaves differently on artificial turf than on natural field. Taking a corner kick is difficult because the playing field does not have a corner-kick preparation area. The corner-kick preparation area is the track, which is unlevelled with the field.



No Turfed Fall out Area; Players Fall into the Running Track



No Corner-Kick Preparation Area

## Tesfaye Identified Social Psychology Problem

To give credit where credit is due, Tesfaye recognized that the ESFNA's problems are a reflection of today's Ethiopians societal problems, [from 15:23 minutes to 18:14 minutes on the PC video](#). Yes, I agree with him. I think we have social psychology problems because we do not have leaders: Those who are brave to tell the truth, to stand for peace and reconciliation, and dare to build institutions. For example, Tesfaye surrounded himself with those "ignorant of the truth so he can lie through ignorance." He made the federation more dysfunctional than ever. For that, I believe the federation highlighted the state of our time, today's Ethiopians societal problems, through his leadership. Arguably, he might be the best thing that ever happened to the federation

– a blessing in disguise – because he brought its problems to the limelight, which is documented in the PC video ESAT taped on July 4, 2014 and aired without fact checking on July 21, 2014.

### **Holding ESAT “To a Basic Standard of Accuracy”**



I see ESAT as an important asset for us. I believe it is providing great services. Regarding the ESFNA, however, I consider it partial on the side of president Tesfaye and his toadies against the facts. In the press conference (PC) ESAT’s Reporters Beruke Yibas and Mahlet Abera asked Tesfaye great questions. But they came out with non-answers, and they aired the PC video without fact checking – which was overloaded with avalanche of false claims

In my view, Beruke’s relatively higher neutrality and fairness than Mahlet’s helped him to perform more courageously than her although they both were opinionated against facts. I believe that Mahlet unintentionally unmasked the ESNFA’s problems via her appeal and “unabashed support” for measures – which made her sound like a state journalist – against the protesters. Although I think they failed to maximize their appeal concerning the issues surrounding the federation, I appreciated them. I hope they would do a great job next time. An article by the Economist, [transparency is the new objectivity](#), is a great read.

### **Conclusion: Why president Tesfaye Should Resign**

He endangered the players’ safety and exposed the federation to potential liabilities. He disregarded the bylaws, alienated the board and became an “autonomous mini-board.” In the process, he fostered enmity among the federation’s members.

The press conference, which was enveloped in false claims from its onset to its end, gave an insight about Tesfaye’s leadership that his claims were intended to discourage those who attempted to strengthen the federation and to prove that the federation is not open to suggestion. Due to that, I took it as a declaration that he planned to keep subjugating and abusing the federation for the benefit of his toadies and himself.

I noted that the players’ well-being was not a concern for him. However, for Gilardi, their welfare was a priority. He strongly advocated the importance of having them compete on a playable field that would help them enjoy the sport more. He exhibited great leadership in front of Captain Dinka whom I consider as Ethiopian’s hero. I think he acted and behaved as Captain Dinka would in that situation, which inspired me to labor this article. While I was distressed by Tesfaye’s limitless superficiality, I was touched by his serene personality and “earnest gesture of goodwill.” I admired his sincere concern for the players and the federation. For that, I dedicated this article for his effort in the press conference.

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