

= Game 39 =

" Game 39 " or the international round was a proposed extra round of matches in the Premier League to be played at neutral venues outside England . The top football league in England , the Premier League is currently played on a double round robin basis , with each team playing the other 19 home and away , giving a total of 38 games . The international round was proposed at a meeting of the 20 Premier League clubs on 7 February 2008 , with a view to being introduced for the 2010 ? 11 season , when a new television broadcasting rights contract would be in place . The proposed start date was later put back to 2013 ? 14 . The proposal was reportedly endorsed by the chairmen of a number of Premier League clubs .

Game 39 resulted in opposition from several club managers . The proposal also met with strong condemnation from supporters ' organisations , who saw it as solely motivated by money to the detriment of fans . Sepp Blatter , president of the sport 's global governing body at that time , expressed a negative opinion of the proposal and stated that it could affect England 's bid to host the 2018 World Cup , and the football authorities in a number of the areas suggested as possible venues for the matches were also opposed . In May 2010 , the Premier League said that it was no longer actively considering game 39 , but in October 2014 it was said to be re @-@ considering the idea .

= = Proposal = =

The Premier League , the top @-@ level football league in England , contains 20 member clubs , with each playing the others once at home and once away for a total of 38 games per season . The proposal envisaged each team playing one further match , a total of ten extra matches , over one weekend in January . Two matches would be played in each of five cities , one each on Saturday and Sunday . Cities would bid for the right to stage matches , but would not be able to specify which teams would be involved . The matches would be held at staggered start times , with venues in different timezones , making it possible in theory to watch live television coverage of all ten . There are conflicting reports about whether the draw for the extra fixtures would be seeded or not .

The week prior to the international round would be free of matches , to allow for travel and acclimatisation . The week after the international round would see each team face one of the teams which had played at the same foreign venue , to avoid any disadvantage for teams with a longer round @-@ trip . Possible venues suggested for international @-@ round matches were Australia , East Asia , Southeast Asia , the Gulf States , and North America . All are wealthy regions where interest in English football is strong relative to the level of the domestic game . Venues would have warm , predictable weather , unlike England in January .

Premier League chief executive Richard Scudamore initially said there would not be more than one international round per season , stating " I stress that on my watch , there will be no 40th game . The value [of a 39th game] is in its uniqueness , in that festival weekend , so there 's no point in diluting it " . Subsequently he suggested the initial plan would last six to ten years and might be altered .

= = Development = =

Foreshadowing the plan were the Premier League Asia Trophy , started in 2003 , and the NFL International Series American football game played at Wembley Stadium in London in 2007 . Rod Eddington pitched the idea of an international round to the Premier League in autumn 2007 . Eddington was chairman of Victorian Major Events Company and a friend of Rupert Murdoch , owner of Sky Sports and other networks with broadcasting rights to the Premier League . He suggested his home city of Melbourne as an inaugural host city . A presentation to the Premier League 's audit @-@ and @-@ remuneration committee was made two weeks before the public announcement . An initial business plan predicted extra earnings from the international round of between £ 40 million and £ 80 million per year .

The Premier League put in place a working party to negotiate with the various concerned parties . It

initially stated that , to proceed with the plan , it needed the support only of the Football Association (FA) and the football governing bodies of the countries of the host cities . It attempted to secure the support of the FA for the proposal by promising to rearrange club fixtures for better convenience to players called up to the England team . Scudamore planned to meet officials from the sport 's global governing body , the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) , before its executive committee meeting in Zurich on 14 March 2008 . On 27 February , after several weeks of mostly negative reaction , Scudamore agreed with Jérôme Valcke , general secretary of FIFA , that the meeting would be postponed indefinitely . The Premier League presented this as an opportunity to rethink its proposals , and said that it would not proceed without FIFA approval .

In May 2008 , Scudamore told BBC Radio 5 Live that the proposal was " not over " , but that the League would " come up with something that ticks more boxes " by January 2009 . In August 2008 , Scudamore said that the League had " a whole host of ideas , some more radical than others , but none quite as radical as the original concept " . In October 2008 , he said Game 39 was still a possibility , although the timing of TV contracts meant it would be in the 2013 / 14 season at the earliest . An agreement in December 2008 between the Premier League and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) was linked to Game 39 by the media .

= = Reactions = =

= = = In England = = =

Richard Scudamore defended the plan as consolidating the Premier League 's global reputation , saying " if we didn 't do it , another sport will come and do it to us " . Scudamore said that the chairmen of all 20 Premier League clubs supported the proposal , and disputed claims by the Daily Mail that Randy Lerner of Aston Villa and Dave Whelan of Wigan Athletic were opposed . David Gold , chairman of Birmingham City , endorsed the plan in part because the larger clubs have in any case already been exploiting foreign markets , with pre @-@ season and even mid @-@ season tours ; Game 39 would distribute its revenue among all the clubs . On 15 February , Liverpool F.C. chief executive Rick Parry stated that the proposal had " never been on Liverpool 's club agenda " and acknowledged the concern of the club 's fans and manager . Paul Hayward , writing in The Guardian , said that the proposal would destroy the balance of the home @-@ and @-@ away round @-@ robin league . The Football Supporters ' Federation (FSF) condemned the proposal as being motivated by money , and dubbed it Gam £ 39 . It launched a petition , with the support of the Daily Mail , to oppose the " outrageous desecration of the national game " . In March 2008 , the campaign was ended as the FSF declared the proposal " effectively dead " . Many die @-@ hard fans who pride themselves on travelling to all their teams ' away matches would have been unable to travel abroad for " Game 39 " . On the other hand , exotic foreign venues would potentially be more appealing destinations for fans than a mundane English city . Managers of Premier League clubs reported to be opposed to or sceptical of the plans included Steve Bruce , Roy Hodgson , Gareth Southgate , and Rafael Benítez . Alex Ferguson criticised the club owners for lack of consultation with managers . Arsène Wenger , Roy Keane , Kevin Keegan , and Avram Grant supported the proposal . ' Game 39 ' was also defended as a move to head off plans for a World League involving only elite clubs such as those formerly in the G @-@ 14 group .

Andy Burnham , the Secretary of State for Culture , Media and Sport , cautioned that football should " not forget its roots " . Gordon Taylor of the Professional Footballers ' Association expressed concern about increased pressure on players . The FA on 15 February expressed " serious reservations " that the proposal might damage England 's bid to host the 2018 World Cup . An FA board meeting on 21 February concluded that the plan was " unsustainable in its current format " .

= = = Elsewhere = = =

The proposal was condemned by Sepp Blatter , president of FIFA , who said it brought the game

into disrepute and would adversely affect England 's bid for the 2018 World Cup . He also said " Football cannot be like the Harlem Globetrotters or a circus " . Michel Platini of the sport 's European governing body , UEFA , called it a " nonsense idea " . Strong reservations were expressed by the Korean FA , and the Japanese FA opposed the plan . Middle @-@ eastern FAs were reportedly more positive . In February 2008 AFC president Mohammed Bin Hammam said he would " vote strongly against " the proposal ; in June he was prepared to reconsider if the plan had FA support ; in October he said he would welcome it if the League shared revenue with the AFC . The Hong Kong FA said it was " very interested " in hosting games . Football Federation Australia said it would oppose it if it impacted its own A @-@ League . Ivan Gazidis , deputy commissioner of Major League Soccer (MLS) in the United States , said that MLS would welcome the plan if it had FIFA approval . Sunil Gulati , the president of the US Soccer Federation , said the USSF would be guided by FIFA about approving any matches .