



The Broken Game: Football & Zionism

July 2026



London | Washington

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“It breaks my heart. So many players and officials have been killed. Sports facilities and clubs have been destroyed by Israeli attacks. I don’t know why FIFA remains silent in the face of Israel’s brutal attacks on Gaza’s football community and infrastructure.

When Israel destroyed my club Al Sadaqa it left me outraged, but the biggest loss came last month when Gaza’s legend and my beloved and kind friend Mohammed Barakat was killed by an attack on his house.

FIFA has always been vocal about humanitarian [causes] and equality with its campaigns but its ongoing silence over the war in Gaza is exposing its hypocrisy. FIFA was quick to ban Russia following its invasion of Ukraine. Then why are they still silent on Gaza?”

Mohammed Balah

Palestinian football player
from the besieged Gaza Strip.¹



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Historic Football in Palestine



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01

Historic Football in Palestine

Since the time of British colonial rule, football has been the most popular sport in Palestine.²

In 1908, two football teams were formed in Palestine, and throughout the following years, football grew in popularity, and started to be played in city streets across Jerusalem, Yaffa, and Haifa.³

In 1928, the Palestine Football Association (PFA) was founded by Josef Yekutieli, a Zionist leader of the Maccabi athletic organisation, in order to allow Zionist teams to participate in FIFA competitions.⁴ The association was dominated by Zionist settlers and excluded the majority of Palestinian football teams from participating, preventing them from playing against teams from other Arab countries.⁵

Despite appeals from Palestinian football teams, FIFA did not allow Palestinian teams not affiliated with the PFA to play in its competitions, enabling Jewish supremacy in football.⁶

In response, Palestinians established the Arab Palestinian Sports Federation (APSF) in 1931, formed by a coalition of 10 pre-existing Palestinian football teams.⁷

During the 1936 Palestinian Revolution, some of the clubs were closed and their members arrested.⁸ Some clubhouses were occupied by the British authorities, such as the Orthodox Club, which became a headquarters for the British authorities.⁹

During the revolt, sports clubs were targeted by British colonial forces for their role in organising Palestinian youth.¹⁰

Alongside the engagement of many club members in the revolt, this led to the suspension of the APSF from 1937.¹¹

In 1948, Zionists changed the name of the PFA to the Israel Football Association.¹²

In 1962, Palestinians founded the Palestinian Football Association (PFA) as the representatives of Palestinian football teams.¹³ However, FIFA would not officially recognise the PFA or include Palestinian teams in FIFA competitions until 1998.⁵²

**“I don’t need money;
I need to be a player
who represents
my homeland, my
people, and the
State of Palestine.”**

Saleem Khader al-Ashqar

a Palestinian goalkeeper martyred by
the IOF on 29 May 2026.¹⁴



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Israel's Assassination of Palestinian Football Players



02

Israel's Assassination of Palestinian Football Players

Israel has killed Palestinian football players for decades, most infamously the targeted assassination of four Palestinian children playing football on the beach in Majdal Shams, the besieged Gaza Strip, in 2008.¹⁵

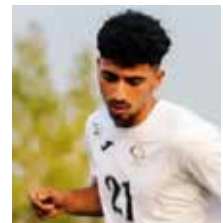
Since the beginning of the genocide in the besieged Gaza Strip, the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) have assassinated over 568 Palestinian football players.¹⁶

Some of the Palestinian footballers killed since October 2023 include:

Fadi al-Nassan

Fadi al-Nassan was a 17-year-old Palestinian football player for Al-Mughayyir Club and the Palestinian national youth team.¹⁷

He ascended to martyrdom on 18 July 2026, succumbing to gunshot wounds from an Israeli settler attack on his village, al-Mughayyir, on 11 July 2026.¹⁸



Saleem al-Ashqar

The IOF killed Palestinian goalkeeper Saleem al-Asqar on 29 June 2026 while he was cycling in al-Qarara, near Khan Younis in the besieged Gaza Strip.¹⁹



Rashid Walid Mahmoud Al-Nims

On 25 October 2025, the IOF killed Rashid Walid Mahmoud Al-Nims, who played for Khadamat Rafah Club, alongside his wife and child in an airstrike.²⁰

Mohammad Al-Tari

On 24 September 2025, the IOF killed Mohammad Al-Tari, a Palestinian footballer for Khadamat Al-Nuseira, known by the nickname 'The Football Nomad', while he waited for humanitarian aid in Rafah.²¹

Israel's Assassination of Palestinian Football Players continued...

Mohammad Ramiz Al-Sultan

On 12 September 2025, the IOF killed Mohammad Ramiz Al-Sultan, a 15-year-old Palestinian football player who played for Al-Hilal Club and had been called the “Messi of Gaza”, when a bomb targeted his home in Gaza City.²²

Malik Abu Al-Amrain

On 6 September 2025, the IOF killed Malik Abu Al-Amrain, a member of the Al-Hilal Sports Club academy, while he was waiting in line for humanitarian aid.²³

Suleiman al-Obeid

On 6 August 2025, the IOF slaughtered Suleiman al-Obeid, a Palestinian footballer from the besieged Gaza Strip known as the ‘Palestinian Pele’, while he was waiting for humanitarian aid.²⁴



Ouda Al-Hathalin

On 28 July 2025, Israeli settlers killed Ouda Al-Hathalin, a Palestinian footballer for Masafer Yatta Club and Susiya Club, while he defended his village of Umm al-Kheir from a settler attack.²⁵

Hamdan Imad Qashta

On 12 March 2025, the IOF killed Hamdan Imad Qashta, a Palestinian footballer for Shabab Rafah Club in a drone strike.²⁶

Mohammed Barakat

On 11 March 2024, the IOF killed Palestinian football player Mohammed Barakat, who had represented the Palestinian national team three times, by bombing his home in Khan Younis.²⁷

Hani Al-Masdar

In January 2024, the IOF killed Hani Al-Masdar, one of Palestine’s greatest footballers and a manager of the Olympic team, when a missile targeted his home.²⁸



“Much like all other Palestinians trapped in this war, I spend long hours without food and clean drinking water. My physical fitness has taken a blow. I have lost weight. Far from playing a game, I haven’t even kicked a ball in months. Football is my passion. It’s also my source of income. I have lost everything.”

Mohammed Balah

Palestinian football player
from the besieged Gaza Strip.²⁹



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Israel's Maiming of Palestinian Football Players



03

Israel's Maiming of Palestinian Football Players

For years, IOF attacks have injured huge numbers of Palestinian football players, many of whom have had to have limbs amputated due to the severity of their injuries.³⁰

Some of the Palestinian footballers affected include:

Muhammed Obeid

On 30 March 2018, Muhammed Obeid, who had played wing-back from Gaza's al-Salah Club, was shot in both knees by the IOF during the Great March of Return protests.³¹

Abdelrahman Nofal

In April 2018, the IOF shot Palestinian youth footballer Abdelrahman Nofal in the leg during the Great March of Return demonstrations, forcing his leg to be amputated. He played for al-Abtal youth team.³²

Waad Al Zurei

In 2015, the IOF shot Palestinian footballer Waad Al Zurei during a protest, causing him to have his leg amputated. He played for al-Abtal team.³³

Adam Halabiya

In January 2014, the IOF shot Palestinian footballer Adam Halabiya in both feet, and he was bitten by attack dogs. He played for Abu Dis FC.³⁴

Jawhar Nasser Jawhar

In January 2014, the IOF shot Palestinian footballer Jawhar Nasser Jawhar eleven times, including in the legs and feet, and he was bitten by attack dogs. He played for Abu Dis FC.³⁵

Muhammad Dahlan

In August 2014, an IOF airstrike injured Palestinian footballer Muhammad Dahlan during Israel's 2014 attacks on the besieged Gaza Strip, causing his leg to be amputated. He played as a left winger for al-Tuffah Club.³⁶

Israel's Maiming of Palestinian Football Players continued...

Islam Amoum

The IOF shot Palestinian goalkeeper Islam Amoum during Israel's 2014 attack on the besieged Gaza Strip, causing him to lose his left arm. He played for al-Abtal team.³⁷

Muhammad Abu al-Bayd

In July 2014, IOF airstrikes hit the home of Palestinian footballer Muhammad Abu al-Bayd, causing his left leg to be amputated. He was an attacking midfielder for al-Daraj Club.³⁸

Hamza Sersawi

In November 2012, IOF attacks on Shuja'iyya neighbourhood injured Palestinian goalkeeper for Al-Jazira Sports Club, Hamza Sersawi, causing paralysis on the left side of his body.³⁹

Wahid Rabah

In July 2006, an IOF drone strike on Bureij Refugee camp caused Wahid Rabah to have his right leg amputated. He played for al-Abtal Team.⁴⁰

“Ramadan tournaments are not the same anymore. They lack the rivalries, the passion and the celebratory atmosphere of the past years. What’s more, we have now been reduced to playing for a food aid package instead of a trophy.”

Moath Raja Allah

one of the top players in Gaza’s Ramadan football tournaments.⁴¹



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FIFA's Double Standards



© Carl Recine, Reuters

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FIFA's Double Standards

Although international sports bodies took decisive measures against Russia after its 2022 invasion of Ukraine, with UEFA and FIFA banning Russian teams from international competitions, similar sanctions and condemnations have not been applied to Israel for its genocide in Palestine.⁴²

The Show Israel the Red Card Campaign is a global movement demanding that FIFA suspends Israel's membership due to its occupation of Palestine.⁴³ The movement began in 2013, and support for the campaign has steadily grown since Israel's genocide in the besieged Gaza Strip began in October 2023.⁴⁴

The campaign endorses the repeated calls from the Palestinian Football Association since 2013 for other national teams to boycott all fixtures against the Israeli national team, and calls for football's governing bodies to suspend Israel from all international competitions.⁴⁵ All of these calls by the PFA have been met with inaction by FIFA.⁴⁶

In 2016, the PFA and BDS urged FIFA to ban Israeli settlement clubs, and 66 EU parliamentarians signed a letter sent to the FIFA President to ban Israeli settlement clubs from participating in FIFA competitions. FIFA still did not act, instead choosing to normalise the theft of Palestinian land.¹¹⁴

Since the genocide started, protests against Israel by football fans have taken place in football stadiums around the world, and the campaign has received backing from fan groups in more than 30 countries, including Türkiye, Spain, Italy, Brazil, Malaysia, and Chile.⁴⁷ Still FIFA did not act.

In September 2025, UEFA paused plans to ban Israel from European football after the announcement of US President Donald Trump's so-called "peace" for the region.⁴⁸

In March 2026, FIFA finally announced it would not kick out Israel but fined its football authority \$190,000 on charges relating to "discriminatory and racist abuse".⁴⁹

“It is clear that Infantino is following in former FIFA president Sepp Blatter’s footsteps, and that his commitment to upholding human rights is a sham. He had an opportunity to correct FIFA’s disgraceful record of delays and selective enforcement of its statutes, but chose instead to double down with more of the same unabashed disregard for international law and its own statutes.

The FIFA Council prevented the Congress from voting on the issue of Israeli settlements, once again shielding Israel from accountability for its violations of FIFA statutes and Palestinian human rights. Today’s FIFA Congress will stain FIFA’s already damaged reputation. Infantino and FIFA have effectively given Israel a green light to continue its repression of Palestinian sports, arbitrarily arrest Palestinian athletes and to continue to play on stolen Palestinian land.”

Hind Awwad

spokesperson for the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel.⁵⁰



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Contemporary Palestinian Football



© Chip Somodevilla, Getty Images

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Contemporary Palestinian Football

The Palestinian national team continues to improve its performance, despite the hardships imposed by Israeli occupation and attacks on football players.⁵³ In November 2017, the Palestinian national team achieved its highest ranking in history, rising above Israel in the FIFA global rankings for the first time.⁵⁴

Domestically, the Palestinian football league system is divided into two regional divisions due to Israel's occupation and apartheid restrictions on Palestinians' freedom of movement.⁵⁵

For men's football, both the West Bank Premier League and the Gaza Strip Premier League consist of 12 teams, while women's football consists of six teams.⁵⁶ Historically, the winners of both leagues would play in the Palestine Cup to determine the national champion.⁵⁷

The most successful and popular West Bank teams include Shabab Al-Khalil, Hilal Al-Quds, and Jabal Al-Mukaber.⁵⁸ In the Gaza Strip league, Rafah is the football capital, with the most popular teams being Khadamat Rafah and Shabab Rafah.⁵⁹ Other popular clubs include Ittihad Shojaeyya and Khadamat Al-Shatea.⁶⁰

Palestinians are also huge supporters of foreign teams, especially Real Madrid, Barcelona, and Palestino – a Palestinian football club in Chile, which has become one of the most popular football clubs in Palestine.⁶²

Palestinians have also tended to support the Spanish national team due to their advocacy and political stance on Palestine.⁶³

Since the beginning of the genocide in the besieged Gaza Strip, all domestic football leagues have been completely suspended.⁶⁴ In Gaza, dozens of football facilities have been damaged or destroyed and hundreds of players killed.⁶⁵

“It’s the Israeli occupation which makes it impossible for us to pursue our dreams and we end up seeking opportunities outside Gaza. Football in Gaza is simply not the same as other places. I have played football in Jordan, Oman and Egypt, and there is a stark difference in the financial backing, training facilities and development plans.”

Mohammed Balah

Palestinian football player
from the besieged Gaza Strip.⁶⁶



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Gianni Infantino's Zionism



© Chip Somodevilla, Getty Images

Gianni Infantino's Zionism

The head of FIFA since 2016, Gianni Infantino, is a Zionist and normaliser.⁶⁷ Throughout his presidency, he has ignored Israel's war crimes and genocide, refusing to ban Israel from participating in football competitions, and failing to address widespread Palestine protests and calls for the boycott of Israeli football.⁶⁸

In 2018, Infantino attended the official signing of the Abraham Accords in Washington – an agreement that sought to normalise relations between the Zionist entity and Arab states.⁶⁹

In 2021, he participated in a conference of the right-wing Zionist newspaper, *The Jerusalem Post*, held in a venue built on the desecrated Muslim cemetery of Mamillah in Jerusalem.⁷⁰

In February 2026, Infantino attended the inauguration of US President Donald Trump's so-called 'Board of Peace', which seeks to enable Israel's genocide in the besieged Gaza Strip and ethnically cleanse Palestinians from their homes through real estate development.⁷¹ He even announced a "strategic partnership to drive recovery and peace through football" with the board.⁷²

In 2026, Infantino personally tried to force the head of the PFA to shake hands with his Israeli counterpart in an attempt at normalisation.⁷³ PFA President Jibril Rajoub refused to shake hands with his occupier.

“I would go to bed at night and stare at the ceiling expecting it to come crashing down on my head at any moment [during Israel’s 2014 attacks on the besieged Gaza Strip]. Many players that I played against or with while in Gaza have died.”

Mahmoud Wadi

Palestinian football player who became the most expensive transfer in Palestinian football in 2021 when he transferred to Egypt’s Pyramids FC.⁷⁴



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Zionism in Football



© Getty Images

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Zionism in Football

Players

Oleksandr Zinchenko

On 8 October 2023, Arsenal FC's Ukrainian defensive midfielder Oleksandr Zinchenko posted a Star of David with the caption "I stand with Israel" on Instagram.⁷⁵



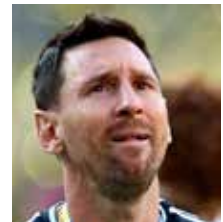
Lionel Messi

In August 2013, Messi joined FC Barcelona on a so-called "peace tour" to Palestine and the occupied territories, a propaganda effort designed to launder Israel's occupation and ethnic cleansing under the guise of unity.⁷⁶

The team also toured the Western Wall in occupied Jerusalem, met with Israeli President Shimon Peres, who praised them as "messengers of peace," and engaged with wanted war criminal and Polish-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at an event.⁷⁷ Messi also visited occupied Palestine in 2019, 2021, and 2022.⁷⁹

In December 2017, the Tel Aviv-based Sirin Labs hired Messi as its global ambassador.⁷⁸

In 2020, Messi signed a three-year contract to become a brand ambassador for the Israeli company OrCam.⁸⁰



Thibaut Courtois

Courtois is married to Israeli model and former IOF captain Mishel Gerzig and he has frequently spoken out in support of the Zionist entity, including during Israel's genocide in the besieged Gaza Strip.⁸¹



Zionism in Football continued...

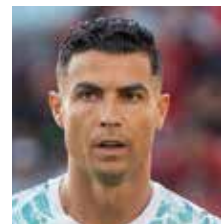
Neymar Jr

In 2019, Neymar Jr accepted a personal video invitation from wanted war criminal and Polish-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to visit the country.⁸²



Cristiano Ronaldo

In 2016, Ronaldo appeared in a commercial for the Israeli cable company HOT.⁸³



Management

Arsenal FC

In 2024, Arsenal FC fired their kit manager, Mark Bonnick, who had worked at the club for 22 years before his sacking on Christmas Eve, due to his posts in support of Palestine on social media.⁸⁴ He is now suing the club for unfair dismissal and discrimination.⁸⁵



In 2026, Arsenal announced Deel as their sleeve sponsors for the 2026/2027 season.⁸⁶ The company was co-founded by two Israelis, Alex Bouaziz and Ofer Simon, who have supported Israel's genocide in the besieged Gaza Strip and supported company employees who have committed genocide in Gaza.⁸⁷

Mainz 05

In 2023, the German football club Mainz 05 suspended and then terminated the contract of Anwar El Ghazi over social media posts in support of Palestine.⁸⁸



Zionism in Football continued...

The following Premier League teams also have sponsorships with corporations complicit in Israeli occupation and genocide:⁸⁹

 Technology & surveillance	 Finance & energy
 Material & ideological support	 Destruction of Palestinian homes / sustaining illegal settlements

Alphabet   	 	 	Canon  
 			
Carlsberg 	   	Coca-Cola 	 
 		    	 
 	evelyn 	HPE  	 
		 	
   	ORACLE   	SONY  	 
			

Source: War on Want, Red Card: English Premier League sportswashing of Israel's atrocities against the Palestinians

“I find solace on the football pitch. I know I will be killed, so I want to enjoy the last moments of my childhood. We are no longer children.”

Karam Al-Hwajri

12-year-old Palestinian Real Madrid fan from the besieged Gaza Strip.⁹⁰



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Pro-Palestine Football Players



© Al Jazeera

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Pro-Palestine Football Players

Hossam Hassan

Throughout the 2026 FIFA World Cup, Egyptian head coach Hossam Hassan repeatedly spoke out in support of Palestine and condemned Israel's genocide in the besieged Gaza Strip.⁹¹

He also dedicated Egypt's wins to the Palestinian people, held the Palestinian flag after matches that Egypt won, and spat at the Zionist entity's flag.⁹²



Pep Guardiola

Former Manchester City manager Guardiola has repeatedly spoken out in support of Palestine and condemned Israel's genocide in the besieged Gaza Strip.⁹³

In January 2026, during the Act x Palestine charity event in his native Barcelona, Guardiola wore a traditional keffiyeh and gave an emotional speech pleading for help for Palestinian children.⁹⁴ He criticised world leaders as “cowards” and stated that the international community has “left them alone, abandoned”.⁹⁵

In February 2026, during a Manchester City press briefing, Guardiola defended his right to speak out about global conflicts. He linked the genocide to other global issues, stating: “The genocide in Palestine, what happened in Ukraine, what happened in Russia, what happened all around the world – in Sudan, everywhere. It's our problems as human beings.”⁹⁶



Lamine Yamal

During Barcelona FC's victory parade for winning La Liga, Lamine Yamal waved the Palestinian flag atop the Barcelona open-top bus. He also shared an image of him holding the flag on his social media.⁹⁷



Pro-Palestine Football Players continued...

Wesly Fofana and Hamza Choudhury

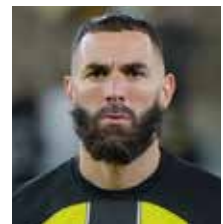
In 2021, two Leicester City players — Hamza Choudhury and Wesley Fofana — held up the Palestinian flag as they celebrated their victory over Chelsea in the FA Cup final.⁹⁸



Karim Benzema

Karim Benzema has repeatedly spoken out in support of Palestine, including in October 2023, when he posted on social media: “All our prayers are for the inhabitants of Gaza who are once again victims of these unjust bombings which spare no women or children”.⁹⁹

Following the post, a French senator suggested his French citizenship should be withdrawn.¹⁰⁰



Riyad Mahrez

In 2021, Mahrez waved a Palestinian flag at the Etihad Stadium following Manchester City’s victory over Everton.¹⁰¹



Mohamed El Neny

El Neny has repeatedly posted on social media in support of Palestine.¹⁰²



Paul Pogba and Amad Diallo

In 2021, Paul Pogba and Amad Diallo raised the Palestine flag after Manchester United’s draw with Fulham.¹⁰³



Pro-Palestine Football Players continued...

Héctor Bellerín

Bellerín has repeatedly and vocally supported Palestine for a number of years, and has explicitly used the term genocide.¹⁰⁴ He has also criticised global inaction and football's double standards on Palestine compared with Ukraine, worn pro-Palestine clothing, and praised the resilience of the Palestinian national football team.¹⁰⁵



Anwar El Ghazi

El Ghazi was suspended by Mainz 05 on 17 October for sharing a pro-Palestinian post on Instagram that stated: "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free", and his contract was later terminated by the club.¹⁰⁶

Following his contract termination, he posted, "Stand for what is right, even if it means standing alone. The loss of my livelihood is nothing when compared to the hell being unleashed on the innocent and vulnerable in Gaza".¹⁰⁷



Eric Cantona

Cantona has been a vocal supporter of Palestine, calling for boycotts of Israeli sports team on social media and supporting the campaign for FIFA to ban Israel from international football.¹⁰⁸

He has also appeared at Palestine fundraisers and supported Palestinian teams, such as Lajee Celtic Club from Aida Refugee Camp in Bethlehem.¹⁰⁹



Diego Maradona

Maradona repeatedly spoke out in support of Palestine before his death. In 2012, Maradona described himself as "the number one fan of the Palestinian people", saying "I respect them and sympathise with them," and "I support Palestine without any fear".¹¹⁰

He also stated that "In my heart, I am Palestinian", and condemned Israel's 2014 attacks on the besieged Gaza Strip.¹¹¹



“If there is anyone in this world who does not feel the suffering of the Palestinian people, they have lost an essential part of their humanity, regardless of their nationality, religion, or background – whether Arab, European, American, or from anywhere else. [...]

We live in safe homes, sheltered by air conditioning in the summer and warmth in the winter. We have food and water whenever we want. Meanwhile, children and families there live in tents through the summer heat and winter cold, without shelter to protect them. Children have nothing to eat, and families face illness, hunger, and fear every day. [...]

Please, let your message be that the Palestinian people deserve to live.”

Hossam Hassan

Egyptian national team coach.¹¹²



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Western Media Bias

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Friday, July 24, 2026
9:04 am (Paris)

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SPORTS • FOOTBALL

Why Israel faces no sanctions from international sports bodies, unlike Russia

Israeli teams, clubs and athletes continue to participate in international competitions, despite mounting calls for their exclusion. Independent UN experts urged FIFA and UEFA to impose sanctions on Tuesday.

By Denis Ménétrier

Published on September 25, 2025, at 1:35 am (Paris), updated on September 25, 2025, at 10:04 am · 4 min read · [Lire en français](#)

09

Western Media Bias

Failure to support boycott of Israeli football

Despite supporting Russia's suspension from football competitions, Western media have revealed their double standards by failing to support calls for the boycott of Israeli football teams.

sky news

Trump administration will push back if FIFA bans Israel from international football as UEFA close to suspension decision

BBC NEWS

Boycott of Israel games would cause 'significant and lasting harm' - FAI

ESPN

FIFA Council takes no action against Israel, urges peace

Western Media Bias



INDEPENDENT

The backlash against Israel is starting to show across sports and culture



INDEPENDENT

Potential boycott of Israeli matches ‘may have no impact at all’, says Taoiseach



NEWS

Scotland players have not discussed Israel boycott

Le Monde

Why Israel faces no sanctions from international sports bodies, unlike Russia

Western Media Bias

THE IRISH TIMES

Ireland will play Israel in Serbia as neutral venue for Nations League match



Why are Israel's football clubs playing in Serbia?

“FIFA is a racist and hypocritical body. The world has to look with both eyes to see the truth, not one.”

Mohammad Abed

a Palestinian Premier League fan.¹¹³



Endnotes

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