

FIFA Corruption Trial Concludes as Lawyers for Former Fox Executives Discredit Key Witness



The trial of two former 21st Century Fox executives accused of bribing South American soccer officials has ended, with lawyers for the defendants assailing the credibility of the government's star witness. Carlos Martinez and Hernan Lopez were charged with wire and securities fraud conspiracy, with allegations that they schemed to pay tens of millions of dollars in bribes to secure lucrative broadcasting rights for international soccer tournaments. Alejandro Burzaco, a cooperating witness, testified that his former business partners knew about and approved the bribes.

In closing arguments at Brooklyn federal court on Friday, a lawyer for Martinez told jurors that Burzaco had run the scheme in secret and falsely accused his client in the hope of getting a lighter sentence as part of his deal with prosecutors. "Cooperation agreements aren't magic wands," said lawyer Steven McCool. "They don't turn liars into truth-tellers." Meanwhile, a lawyer for Burzaco argued that his client had been "truthful and consistent" and that it was "absurd" to suggest he was lying in his "highly corroborated" testimony.

The case is part of a broader corruption probe of global soccer, and its governing body, FIFA, which has led to numerous convictions since US and international authorities made their first arrests in 2015. Over the seven-week trial, jurors saw emails, contracts, and business records that prosecutors say reveal a years-long scheme to bribe top officials at CONMEBOL, South American soccer's governing body.

The defense argued that none of the documents directly implicated Martinez or Lopez and said Burzaco's stories of meetings where the three men discussed the bribes were fiction. "Burzaco had nothing to gain and everything to lose by bringing Hernan Lopez and Carlos Martinez in (on the scheme)," said David Sarratt, an attorney for Lopez. Full Play Group SA, a co-defendant, is also accused of bribing soccer officials. The Argentina-based sports marketing company's lawyers have argued that bribery is an entrenched part of doing business in South America and, therefore, not fraudulent.

During her closing rebuttal, prosecutor Kaitlin Farrell said that Burzaco's testimony was "devastating" but disputed his centrality to the case, describing him as a guide through the corrupt world of international soccer. "This is a document case that has a narrator," Farrell said. The prosecution argued that the defendants knew of the bribes and that the evidence proved their guilt. The jury will now deliberate on the case and deliver a verdict. If convicted, Martinez and Lopez face potential prison sentences and hefty fines.