

FD Solutions

The flexible Finance Director service



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Alex Horne is a man on who, it seems, timing and luck gaze kindly. The announcement of his promotion in late March to acting chief executive officer of the Football Association (FA), from the chief operating officer spot, comes in time for the 2010 World Cup and the launch of the UK's 2018 bid.

It also comes on the heels of one of the most murky periods of the beautiful game's business side – from the staggering mount of debt owed by a chunk of Premier League clubs (more than all the other clubs in Europe put together, according to the Union of European Football Associations, or UEFA) to smaller clubs joining the ranks of the insolvent in alarming numbers.

Horne's promotion is not atypical for the FD world in the last year. Many high-profile finance chiefs have been elevated to the job in the middle of the recession.

"In various sectors of the economy over the course of the recession, FDs have shown the value of moving somebody into the top job who has a strong command of all aspects of running a successful business," says Simon Walters, managing director at headhunter FD Solutions. "Football is a business and at last the FA has placed its faith in someone familiar with all aspects of its affairs, not just someone with a previous public profile that the media will recognise."

Own goal

What is perhaps most intriguing about this appointment is that Horne has done the acting CEO job twice before for the FA, first for a very brief stint before Brian Barwick joined in 2006 and again when Barwick left in late 2008. While neither the FA nor Horne will comment, many think his promotion is a correction of an earlier hiring mistake.

"Horne was the man who should have got the job in the first place," says *Accountancy Age* editor Gavin Hinks.

FD Solutions's Walters concurs. "The association needs someone with the strength of character and self-confidence to be the CEO of an organisation whose members include plenty of people who consider themselves better able to do the job," he says.

Hinks points to Horne's swift ascension from turnaround work at Coopers & Lybrand to FD of the Association in 2003 (from where he was handed responsibility for getting the disastrous →