

**Remarks Prepared for Delivery**  
**Tribute to Esse Baharmast**  
**Werner Fricker Award Dinner Welcome Remarks**  
**U.S. Soccer Annual General Meeting**  
**Nashville, Tennessee**  
**Saturday, February 15, 2020**

*“The Correct Call”*

Good evening everyone! Members, partners and friends—welcome to our Werner Fricker Award Dinner!

This evening, we honor the legacy of a leader who helped build soccer in America to what it is today—a player, an Olympian, and a president of U.S. Soccer—Werner Fricker. The Werner Fricker Award is the highest honor that U.S. Soccer bestows. Nominations are reviewed by a dedicated task force, and we thank chair Evelyn Gill and the task force members for their diligence.

We do not bestow this award every year. We only do so when we believe that an individual or a group of individuals meets our rigorous criteria, including an impact that leaves a truly lasting legacy on the game. Since the first award was presented to Werner Fricker himself in 2002, only 16 men and women have been accorded this honor.

We’re honored to be joined this evening by some of our past Werner Fricker Award recipients—would you please stand as I call your name—Dr. Bob Contiguglia, Bob Gansler, Richard Groff, Gerhard Mengel, Francisco Marcos, Kevin Payne, and Sunil Gulati.

Tonight, we present the Werner Fricker Award for only the 17<sup>th</sup> time—to a player, a coach and one of the most admired referees in the history of the game—the great Esse Baharmast!

We can all be a little jealous of our referees. As Esse says, they “get the best seat in the house.” He certainly had a good seat when he made that unforgettable call in the 1998 World Cup. In the 88<sup>th</sup> minute of the match between Brazil and Nigeria, Esse saw a penalty that everyone else, including 16 cameras, seemed to miss. Now you know why we have VAR!

After the match, Esse was criticized, even vilified. But he said, “in my heart of hearts...I knew I made the correct call.” And then, a day or so later, when video from another angle clearly showed the penalty, Esse was vindicated.

One moment does not make a career. But it can define a career. And that moment has defined the commitment of our honoree tonight, from his contributions to the Olympics to MLS to U.S. Soccer.

In fact, this is only the second time that U.S. Soccer has bestowed the Werner Fricker Award on a referee. But it’s a reflection of our immense gratitude to Esse and to all our referees. Thank you for dedicating your career to making the correct call.

Thank you all for being here. The program will resume after dinner. Enjoy your meal, and have a wonderful evening!