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## Crystal Palace Demoted in UEFA Power Struggle Over Multi-Club Ownership

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Crystal Palace's controversial drop from the Europa League to the Conference League exposes the growing cracks in UEFA's broken system of multi-club ownership regulation.

Crystal Palace has been demoted from the UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) Europa League to the third-tier Europa Conference League, not due to anything on the pitch but because of a murky, bureaucratic ruling tied to multi-club ownership. It's a bitter pill for a club that earned its place in Europe fairly, only to be knocked back by a system that seems more concerned with appearances than fairness.

The controversy centres on American businessman John Textor, who previously held a minority stake in Palace while also investing in French side Olympique Lyonnais.

UEFA concluded that, as of March 1, 2024, the two clubs breached its multi-club ownership rules. Yet by July 5, Textor had no remaining connection to either; he had sold his Palace shares to Woody Johnson, pending Premier League approval, and resigned from Lyon's board weeks earlier. That timing hasn't mattered to UEFA, sticking rigidly to the documents submitted months ago, refusing to account for the changed circumstances.

Palace chairman Steve Parish didn't hold back in his criticism, branding the decision "one of the greatest injustices in European football."

Speaking to *Sky Sports*, he argued that UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin or another senior figure should step in. "We believe it's possible for Mr Ceferin or somebody to intervene in this process," he said. "There's a real crossroads for UEFA to look at."

## Governance Failure

What makes matters worse is the apparent inconsistency in how UEFA enforces these rules. While Palace is being punished, Nottingham Forest, the club set to benefit by taking their Europa League spot, has its own entanglements.

Forest owner Evangelos Marinakis also owns Olympiakos in Greece. Last season, he placed his influence into a blind trust to avoid breaching the same regulations. Still, he was spotted celebrating on the pitch after Forest's match against Leicester, despite not being an officially named director. That trust has since been dissolved, but UEFA appears unbothered.

And it's not just Forest. Clubs like Chelsea and Aston Villa have been found to breach UEFA's financial rules, but were simply fined. Chelsea even issued a statement that read more like a thank-you note, saying the club "greatly values its relationship with UEFA" after agreeing to pay a £27 million settlement. For the wealthiest clubs, these fines are little more than pocket change – a cost of doing business rather than a true deterrent.

In the book *States of Play*, former UEFA executive Alex Phillips bluntly summarised the issue, explaining that the biggest clubs rarely face meaningful punishment. "The simple fact

that UEFA is also the organiser of the Champions League means they have an interest in preserving teams like PSG and City,” he said.

The conflict of interest is clear. UEFA is supposed to regulate the game while also profiting from its biggest competitions. That dual role leaves smaller clubs like Palace exposed, easy to sanction, while the giants go untouched.

Even more baffling, Palace’s co-owner, David Blitzler, also owns a stake in Danish club Brøndby through his Global Football Holdings group, a situation UEFA seems perfectly content to overlook. Why one connection is deemed a breach and the other ignored only adds to the confusion.

Palace is now appealing the decision to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), clinging to the hope that common sense might prevail. But this entire episode has highlighted the need for serious reform in European football governance. Without it, more clubs will find themselves punished not for breaking the rules, but for falling foul of a system that no longer makes sense.