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## Allocations for 2006 spark outrage

A half-berth in a field of 32 teams might not seem a lot, but FIFA's decision to reallocate two half-berths in the World Cup for the 2006 finals in Germany triggered an uproar in South America.

FIFA cut 0.5 spots from the totals of South America and Europe for 2002 and gave them to CONCACAF and Oceania in 2006. CONCACAF's No. 4 team will play off against Asia's fifth team for the last place at the 2006 finals.

The decision by the FIFA executive committee Dec. 17 in Madrid followed intense politicking by various confederations to keep or increase their berths.

A reallocation of one berth was necessary because of FIFA's decision in 2001 to end the practice of awarding the defending champion an automatic berth in the next finals. Champion Brazil will therefore have to qualify via the marathon South American tournament (18 games).

Julio Cesar Grondona, president of the Argentine federation and the highest-ranking South American on the FIFA executive committee, didn't endear himself to his South American colleagues when he downplayed the decision that left South America with only four slots for Germany '06.

"There are more important things in the world than half a place more or less at the World Cup," he said.

With its record of having played in every World Cup but one since 1958, Argentina doesn't have to worry if South America gets 4.5 or 4.0 slots. But smaller countries were furious.

"If we don't protest today," Luis Chiriboga, president of the Ecuadoran federation, warned, "they will want to take another place away from us through the dictatorship of the vote."

Paraguayan Nicolas Leoz, the South American confederation (CONMEBOL) president, took aim at Africa: "Does CAF [African soccer confederation] deserve five places for 2006?"

African teams have reached the quarterfinals of the World Cup only twice — Cameroon in 1990 and Senegal in 2002 — and four of their five representatives failed to reach the second round in each of the two World Cups since Africa's allocation was increased from three to five teams.

The biggest argument in South America's favor is its record in playoffs. Colombia, Argentina and Uruguay won playoffs in 1990, 1994 and 2002, respectively.

By contrast, Oceania, which had the support of FIFA president Sepp Blatter in its effort to gain a direct berth, has a miserable record in qualifying. Australia lost to South America's No. 5 team twice and Asia's No. 4 team once in playoffs for the last three World Cups.

Everyone agreed that a new system had to be created to avoid the political overtones to the allocations. South Americans claim they are neglected because CONMEBOL consists of only 10 federations.

Four years ago, Asian federations walked out on the FIFA Congress in Los Angeles to protest Asia's allotment for 2002. Europe gave Asia an extra half-berth — Ireland beat Iran in a playoff — but CONMEBOL refused to concede a half-berth.

What South America wouldn't part with four years ago has now been taken away from it.

### By Paul Kennedy

Uruguay's Gianni Guigou moves through the Australian defense during the South America-Oceania World Cup playoff series in 2001. South America and Oceania teams have had contrasting fortunes in recent playoffs.

### WORLD CUP ALLOCATIONS

CONFEDERATION	1998	2002	2006
Europe	15.0	14.5	14.0
Africa	5.0	5.0	5.0
South America	5.0	4.5	4.0
Asia	3.5	4.5	4.5
CONCACAF	3.0	3.0	3.5
Oceania	0.5	0.5	1.0