

# Venables transfer fee mystery

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BY RICHARD FLETCHER

THE ROLE of Terry Venables in a controversial Crystal Palace football transfer has been highlighted in a high court judgement against Mark Goldberg, the former owner of Crystal Palace Football Club, and Jim McAvoy, the former chief executive.

The judgement disqualified Goldberg and McAvoy from serving as company directors for at least two years. However, in his 62 page judgement, Mr Justice Lewinson discusses the events surrounding the transfer of David Amsalem, an Israeli defender, to Crystal Palace for a reported fee of £800,000 in June 1998. At the time, Venables was manager of the club.

The judge says: "The size of this fee is mysterious, because a subsequent letter of 22 July 1998 from the Israel Football Association, complaining of non-payment of the transfer fee, records it as being \$20,000 (£11,600)."

He adds that this confusion over the size of the fee was raised at a board meeting a week after Crystal Palace received the letter from the Israel Football Association.

Notes of the board meeting record that there was "a full and frank" discussion.

"That was a diplomatic euphemism for a heated discussion, in which allegations of impropriety were made against Mr Venables. He was accused of 'having his hand in the till'," says Lewinson in his judgement.

The signing of David Amsalem proved controversial at the time. After less than a year at the club Amsalem's contract was cancelled.

A spokesman for Venables said: "Mr Venables was not a director of Crystal Palace, he was only the coach. He made recommendations to the board in respect to transfers." He denied any suggestion of wrongdoing by Venables.

The court case against Goldberg and McAvoy was brought by Patricia Hewitt, the trade and industry secretary, who claimed that both were unfit to run corporate businesses. Two days into the hearings, Goldberg, an entrepreneur best known for his involvement in MSB International, agreed to be disqualified.