



SPENCER TUNICK

61



SUNNY JACOBS

62



MCCANN

64



DRUG VALUATION

65



WIKIPEDIA FACES LEGAL BATTLE



How accurate is online encyclopedia Wikipedia? Controversial lawyer **GIOVANNI DI STEFANO** says the website hasn't moved fast enough to deal with the gross lies and distortions that litter his Wikipedia entry. Now Di Stefano has launched a legal action that, if successful, could fatally damage the Wikipedia Foundation. **WORDS Jason O'Toole**

PLUS **CASCARINO**
ON ROBBIE KEANE'S
POSSIBLE MOVE TO
LIVERPOOL

59



The online encyclopedia Wikipedia, which began as a brilliant and idealistic project, based on the objective of sharing knowledge and information, is heading for stormy waters. A voluntary organisation, from the outset Wikipedia worked on two key principles: that there is effectively no limit to the amount of information that can be gathered on the world wide web; and that the internet makes it possible to continually edit and update information. The holy grail beckoned: that people possessed of the necessary knowledge and authority could create the ultimate information resource, one that would not just be thoroughly accurate but also up to date. It would blow other encyclopaedias out of the water.

For a while, it seemed that this ambitious objective might be realised. Through the work of teams of dedicated voluntary writers and editors, the volume of material carried under the Wikipedia banner mushroomed in the most extraordinary way. Today

there are millions of profiles, the entire collection running into billions of words. But as the store of information has grown, so too has the amount of downright disinformation. Wikipedia has developed a reputation for inaccuracy – and, what's more, for malicious inaccuracy, outright lies and propaganda – in a worryingly high proportion of its entries.

The worm in the apple is this. In practice, anyone can post or edit a Wikipedia entry. The origins of any editorial material, including the changes, additions and edits are in theory traceable. But in practice, with people in the online world adept at hiding behind aliases and covering their tracks, that is often far more difficult than was intended. As a result, the encyclopaedia has been dragged down into a mire of controversy by the kind of malice-driven, rumour-mongering creepy crawlies who thrive on the anonymity afforded by the internet.

FACELESS COWARDS

Hot Press has learned that Wikipedia's reputation for inaccuracy may prove to be its undoing. The controversial





Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales: "Aware" of problems with Di Stefano's entry.

"THE PROBLEM WITH WIKIPEDIA IS THAT YOU HAVE NAMELESS, FACELESS PEOPLE WHO HIDE BEHIND NOM DE PLUMES WHO ARE COWARDS. THEY ARE PEOPLE WHO DARE NOT STAND UP AND SAY WHAT THEY THINK PUBLICLY."

Italian lawyer Giovanni Di Stefano has hit the Wikipedia organisation with a staggering €50million defamation case in the Italian courts. If successful, it would surely spell the end of Wikipedia.

Di Stefano – nicknamed “The Devil’s Advocate” because he has represented many notorious clients,

including Saddam Hussein, Slobodan Milosevic, Harold Shipman, John Gilligan and Paddy ‘Dutchy’ Holland – has had a long-running dispute with Wikipedia over the inflammatory content of the entry bearing his name. Di Stefano says he opted to take the legal action after being constantly infuriated by a series of what he describes as outrageous accusations made on Wikipedia. Among the lies peddled about him is that he is not even qualified to practice law. Among other inaccuracies, the entry also states that he is banned from America.

Apart from seeking compensation, Di Stefano is also threatening to seek arrest warrants for his web detractors – including the anonymous contributors to Wikipedia who he says have bad-mouthed and slandered him. Speaking to *Hot Press* from Iraq where he’s working on cases involving Tariq Aziz and Chemical Ali, Di Stefano declared that this could be Wikipedia’s ‘Waterloo’.

In typically colourful language, Di Stefano told *Hot Press* that he is aiming to get the “anonymous fucking cunts” who are attempting to undermine his credibility and reputation.

“The article on me is clearly written aggressively and with factual errors – which when you try and correct, and politely, the correction gets deleted. Well, this has gone on for a year now and although Jimbo Wales (the founder of Wikipedia) did intervene,

he has not been able to stay on top of things like a hawk. I showed him my qualifications. I even showed him my visa entries to the US in my passport. But the inaccuracies persist. So I have sued for defamation.”

Di Stefano insists that his objective is to ensure that Wikipedia “returns to being an encyclopedia of fact” by removing defamatory material in articles; and secondly, to ensure that Wikipedia contributors are clearly identified in any of their work.

“I’m taking legal action against Wikipedia because they are the only magazine media outlet which produces material without a signature. In other words, when you wrote your article on me in *Hot Press* there were maybe things that I didn’t like, but if I wanted to sue I had a name – Mr O’Toole. You put your name to it. The problem with Wikipedia is that you have nameless, faceless people who hide behind *nom de plumes* who are cowards. They are people who dare not stand up and say what they think publicly.

“I had a long conversation with Jimbo and I told him that this would be his Waterloo. He had a very good idea, but faceless people are writing harmful and defamatory material. But the whole point is transparency. In the media, you have a name. If those people who wrote shit about me put their names to it, I could sue them – I don’t sue people unless it’s really, really necessary. Like *The Guardian*. Like *Scotland On Sunday*. And then we are friends again.”

CRIMINAL OFFENCE

Contacted by *Hot Press*, Wikipedia founder Jimmy ‘Jimbo’ Wales acknowledged that he was “very much aware” of Di Stefano and the problem with his entry on Wikipedia. However, while he would gladly discuss the issue off the record, Wales was reluctant to make any official comment. For the record, a spokesperson for Wikipedia stated: “We are unaware of any legal action being brought against Wikipedia.”

Up to a point, this may be true, in that the form of the action being taken is unusual. Di Stefano points out that, rather than issuing a writ, he sent Wikipedia a legal letter – which can be read on his website – back in April, notifying them of his intention to go down the legal route. He has taken an approach to the process that is uniquely Italian. Di Stefano told *Hot Press* that, unlike other EU states, including Ireland, defamation is actually a criminal offence under Italian law. This allowed him to lodge a formal complaint to the Rome Public Prosecutor regarding defamation committed against him “by a number of people” at the Wikipedia Foundation, as well as several editors who are either anonymous or use pseudonyms. He did this in April 2008.

“In accordance with Italian law, the Public Prosecutor will investigate the complaint and send the matter for trial,” Di Stefano told *Hot Press*. “Under Italian law, the Public Prosecutor is obliged to send the complainants to trial. A case for defamation can take from three months to five years to complete up to the Appellate stages.

“I want to jail some of those nameless people,” he insists. “I have requested the Public Prosecutor to consider the issue of International and European Arrest warrants, in the event those accused fail to attend trial or interrogation. And I want to get a change in the law, so that people must put their names to what they write on Wikipedia, because a person’s reputation is the most important thing. I’ve given them every opportunity to make amends, because I didn’t want to do it. Also, I’ve named the people who write under pseudonyms and I’ve asked for an order of disclosure – and it will happen. It takes time, but it will happen. This week, for example, I sent a journalist to jail for two-and-a-half years for defamation against me in an incident

SIDESWIPE

My top tip to get to sleep at night is to cover your eyelids in black marker pen so none of the light filters through.

- James Blunt’s top tip for nodding off.



from five years ago. It catches up with you. It was an Italian journalist who wrote that I had taken \$160 million from Milosevic and channeled it to Italian politicians. I said, 'You must be mad! If I'd taken that money I'd fucking keep it'. He's going to jail, mate. You go to jail in Italy for defamation. There's no fucking about. That's why I do it here. People laugh, but then when it hits them..."

CLASS ACTION

Di Stefano says that while the defamation case might bankrupt the online encyclopedia, it is not his intention to shut Wikipedia down. "I will probably put it (the money) back into Wikipedia. My intention is not to harm Wikipedia, it is to stop what I believe... At the moment, it's me that's doing it and I'm a friendly face with Jimbo, but he obviously doesn't want to learn the lesson the normal way. I've no objections to people writing shit about me, but at least put your name to it, to show that you've got balls.

"If a person believes that I've been to prison 20 times; that I've robbed banks; that I tried to escape from prison – all of that is part of a legend. It makes people think, 'Fuck me! If Giovanni can do this, what can he do for me?' It's not that, I complain about – I complain about the faceless people who go around ruining ideas. It's stopped since I issued a criminal action in Italy. Most of the people in Wikipedia are my friends – it's just the fucking cunts who deliberately want to ruin a good idea. It's not so much an attack on me – it's an attack on Wikipedia."

If nothing else, Di Stefano's legal battle should at the very least raise a serious debate on the contentious issue of inaccuracies and deliberately misleading information being published, not just on Wikipedia but over the internet generally.

Jay Walsh, Head of Communications, WikimediaFoundation.org, is adamant that most complaints made against inaccuracies or false information can be quickly resolved. "We would be reached at the Foundation, and dispatch the request to a team of trusted volunteers. They would look at the request against Wikipedia's basic 'pillars', or best practices. Basically, these ask the question of the article or content: is the article neutral, is it unnecessarily censored? Are these verifiable / sourced facts? Is the article 'notable' and is this new or unpublished research?

"It's worth saying that Wikipedia's volunteer editors are consumed with the ideas of quality, reliability and trust. Generally speaking we use an effective public response system to deal with errors and matters brought to our attention. If concerns come directly to us, we bring them to the volunteers, usually administrator editors, who provide careful support to help get the matters resolved."

Wikipedia, according to Walsh, are also working on new "software-based solutions" in an effort to ensure greater accuracy. He says that this system would basically mark or 'flag' high quality articles on Wikipedia, and ensure that all subsequent edits are also of high quality. "In other words, vandal, or unregistered users could 'propose' edits to those articles, but only trusted editors would approve them, meaning the flagged, quality version will always be seen," he added.

However, all this might be too little too late. Apart from his defamation case in Italy, Di Stefano says he is now planning to bring a class action against Wikipedia in the US. He is urging those who feel aggrieved by Wikipedia to contact him. "I am ready, willing and able to launch a class action in the US courts, entirely on a 'no win no fee' basis," he says.

It promises to be an intriguing battle.

For further information on the proposed class action, log on to www.studioglealeinternazionale.com



CASCARINO

FOOTBALL'S TOP SCORING PUNDIT

WHAT IRELAND CAN LEARN FROM SPANISH FLAIR

European champions Spain's adventurous, attacking play shows it is possible to win major tournaments without going negative. But there's no reason why, with the right management, Ireland shouldn't be able to hold their own against the Continent's top sides.

There's no doubt that the best team won the Euros. I thought that, right from the outset, Spain looked the best team in a fantastic competition full of adventurous sides who were approaching the game in the right way and trying to score goals.

The biggest disappointments were France and Italy, who went about it in a very cautious, conservative manner and got exactly what they deserved: nothing. France were really drab, and it seemed obvious that Raymond Domenech had no clue what his best team was. He couldn't find the right formula, and seemed to be making the script up as he went along, shuffling his pack in the desperate hope that it would all fall into place. The feeling in France was that they'd reached the World Cup Final two years ago in spite of him, with the senior players basically running the team themselves. Italy didn't look the force they were, either: Luca Toni was a bit of a blunt instrument up front, and they didn't deserve to go any further than they did. On the other hand, Croatia were really enjoyable to watch and very unlucky to go out, Holland played some beautiful stuff before having a bad day against the Russians, and even Germany played some exciting stuff.

Ireland, England and Scotland weren't exactly missed, but I think too much is made of this idea that the continentals have some magic ingredient that makes them better, smarter footballers. It just isn't the case. We have good players in these islands, and you need proper management, which Ireland and England didn't have in the last two years. The Scots had a good manager and beat France twice and came very close to qualifying, without any world-class players, which goes to show how much can be achieved with a bit of good organisation.

football is played here: the level of physical fitness is very good, and we tend to be good at closing down opponents. What's needed is a bit more wit when it comes to breaking teams down, and finding cleverer ways of opening up the opposition. Ireland, and England for that matter, have been outwitted too often in recent years. But there's no great crisis in terms of player quality.

At the time of writing, Robbie Keane is being linked with a move to Liverpool, possibly as part of a swap deal involving Peter Crouch. If it happens, it's a great move for Robbie. The thought of him playing alongside Torres is incredibly exciting. It'd be the first time he's played for a really massive club. I know he was at Inter Milan for a while when he was about 20, but he never quite cracked the first team and maybe wasn't ready for it. I'd hope that if Benitez buys him, he'd give him a regular starting spot on a week-in-week-out basis, because Robbie thrives on confidence. Benitez has been rotating far too much for his own good, and there were hints towards the end of last season that he's starting to learn his lesson. It's the perfect time for Robbie to make a move like this: he's 27, a great age for a striker, and he should have a great five years left in him.

Best of luck to Paul Ince, who's got the Blackburn job after doing great work at Macclesfield and Milton Keynes. There's been a lot of mention of the fact that he's the first black English manager to get a Premier League job, but I think people are making too much of that. It's purely down to the fact that there haven't been enough good ones. Like anything else, what's important is a man's ability to do the job, not the colour of his skin. I don't believe for a minute that any chairman has taken skin colour into account. I saw John Barnes interviewed not long ago, and

he came across as quite bitter about the fact that he'd never been given a second chance after messing up the Celtic job. He seemed to think it was racism, but that's nonsense. If he'd done a good job, it would never have been an issue. Now Ince has a great opportunity, and hopefully he'll prove his worth.



Fernando Torres, European champion, basks in the glory of victory

Managers need to be tactically astute, and all the evidence is that Capello and Trapattoni should rectify the situation, given their past achievements. There are strong points to the way