



GRAHAM WATSON page 10 ▶

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Nationalists hijack national icon

Malta international Michael Mifsud turns election casualty as the PN prop him onto the General Council stage

IT was a whole new ball game for Michael Mifsud last Sunday, when the Malta international took time out from a busy goal-scoring schedule in the English first division to make a surprise appearance on the bench at the PN General Council in St Julian's.

In the aftermath, Mifsud found himself questioned over his surprise presence before hundreds of PN councillors.

But the footballer has privately told friends he did not expect to be seated on the PN's stage next to the prime minister's wife and the PN secretary-general Joe Saliba.

MaltaToday yesterday contacted Saliba to ask him whether Mifsud had been specifically told he was about to be put

on stage, seated in Lawrence Gonzi's chair next to Kate Gonzi.

"He was informed he would attend a political activity organised by the PN," Saliba said, although he stopped short of specifying whether Mifsud knew the activity was specifically the general council.

Repeatedly asked, Saliba would not confirm whether Mifsud was told he was about to be put on the general council stage in the seat of the Prime Minister while Lawrence Gonzi gave his rousing speech. He then said: "wouldn't it be better to ask Mifsud himself."

But the young star has shied away from the press after his presence at the council raised questions over whether he had been fully aware of the event in

question. Saliba himself yesterday said he did not believe the general council was a "partisan" activity, but simply a "political one".

Saliba said this was not the first time the PN had invited celebs to the general council, citing former national team coach Pippo Psaila who led one of the PN's workshops.

"It is not unique to Malta. The American presidential campaign regularly makes use of sporting stars and other celebrities."

But Saliba denied having used Mifsud, ▶ page 8

MIFSUD -
Football star was not aware he would be put on the stage of the PN's general council



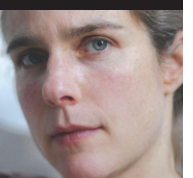
Inside the PN General Council

James Debono's analysis pages 6-7 - Saviour Balzan page 15 - Leader page 13



RUSSIAN TYCOON'S BIRTHDAY BASH AT BARRAKKA pg3

ABORTION DOCTOR MAKES WAVES pg5



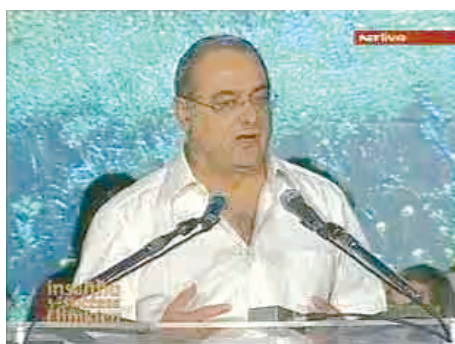
Sant sues Gatt for criminal libel over drunkard comments

LABOUR leader Alfred Sant yesterday filed a report with the police over comments by Investments Minister Austin Gatt made last Sunday at the PN's general council.

In his speech, Gatt referred to Sant as a likely candidate for a Discovery Channel programme which documents world statesmen with alcohol and drug problems.

The crude joke, which started off Gatt's address to PN councillors, was later publicly disowned by PN secretary-general Joe Saliba on Monday on Bondiplus.

Yesterday, Sant's lawyer Pawlu Lia filed a report at the St Julian's police station to in-



Gutter language from Austin Gatt

stitute criminal libel proceedings against Gatt over "false and defamatory allegations" he made last Sunday.

Sant said Gatt had attributed facts to him which were intended at offending his honour and reputation and to expose him to public ridicule.

The maximum penalty for being found guilty of criminal libel is a three-month prison sentence.

In a statement issued yesterday afternoon, the investments ministry said the Opposition Leader had quoted Gatt's words out of context. "The words quoted by the MLP were used in a wider context which Alfred Sant wants to ignore... since action has

been taken in court, Minister Gatt will use all opportunity at law to prove there was no attempt at defaming the Labour leader."

The ministry said Gatt's words were stated in the context of Sant's speech at Birzebbugia during an Independence Day rally in which the Labour leader mentioned Gonzi's name in a mocking and lugubrious ▶ page 8

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