

Blowing the Whistle on Corruption in Sport



An "early warning system" for referees at risk?

The German branch of watchdog organization Transparency International has called on sports-governing bodies to tackle corruption in the sports sector in the run up to this year's World Cup in Germany.

Sports is no longer just about enjoying the game. Transparency International (TI) in Berlin said the risk of corruption in sports -- particularly soccer -- has increased dramatically as commercial influences grow.

DW-WORLD.DE spoke to Sylvia Schenk, a lawyer, former professional athlete and member of the new working group Transparency International-Germany has set up to combat corruption. "Sports is a big economic area. And just like in other sectors of society, sports is vulnerable to corruption. It's not a holy realm," said Schenk.

The betting scandals that have plagued German soccer over the past year, for instance, showed the susceptibility of the sport to criminal manipulation, she said.

"Despite the number of individual cases recently there has been far too little public discussion of corruption in sport," said Hansjoerg Elshorst, chairman of Transparency International-Germany, at a recent news conference.



Bildunterschrift: [Großansicht des Bildes mit der Bildunterschrift: "The good image](#)

[of sports is essential"](#)

The agency is urging sports officials to be more vigilant, particularly ahead of the June 9-July 9 World Cup.

Corruption is not a one-time occurrence

Rather than singling out individual cases, Transparency International-Germany's new anti-corruption group hopes to survey sports clubs and associations to gain a broader picture of how sports corruption functions.

Corruption can start on a very basic level. "In Germany, but also in other countries, there is a long tradition in the lower leagues of paying money -- not officially, but

under the table," Schenk told DW-WORLD. "That's not corruption per se, but it does show that you have a situation in the club in which corruption could develop." Officials in small sports clubs, for example, do not attend to issues like proper tax declaration and documenting money flow, like how and when players or coaches are paid, Schenk said.



Bildunterschrift: [Großansicht des Bildes mit der Bildunterschrift: German referee](#)

[Robert Hoyzer admitted to match-fixing](#)

The first step in combating corruption is for sports organizations to clearly state their intention to fight criminal manipulation. "It sends out a signal to potential criminals and can prompt people who suspect corruption somewhere in the chain to report it," said Schenk. "Often, people are aware of something, but they are too scared to talk about it."

Sports falls from grace

People's reluctance to shatter sports' illusion of innocence often keeps them from reporting cases. And, another aspect to consider: "The image of sports is very important, particularly to the sponsors," Schenk said. "Usually the sponsors are buying a good image when they support a particular sport. Take away the good image and you put funding at risk."

Globally-active Transparency International said knowledge about corruption in other sectors of society can help to identify problematic areas in sports. It also said it wants to promote co-operation between sports federations to improve transparency.

Anti-corruption guidelines are essential

By sports organizations working together, they can define rules about what is acceptable or not -- like whether or not sports officials should accept gifts or invitations from sponsors, for example. Once guidelines have been established, all sports organizations should be required to adhere to them, Schenk explained to DW-WORLD.



Bildunterschrift: [Großansicht des Bildes mit der Bildunterschrift: Where there's](#)

[smoke, there's fire: sports corruption is international](#)

But just how widespread is corruption in sports? In Germany, soccer leaders had hoped a scandal involving former referee Robert Hoyzer -- who was convicted in 2005 for his bid to rig nine matches in a two million euro (\$2.4 million) fraud deal -- was singular. They were wrong. Prosecuting attorneys in Frankfurt and Cologne, among other cities, are investigating new reports of game manipulation.

Corruption is not limited to Germany either. Schenk said there are plenty of cases of betting manipulation in Belgium, and the scandal over the way the 2002 Winter Olympic Games were awarded to Salt Lake City shows how necessary reform of The International Olympic Committee was. "Corruption is not just a German issue, but an international one," said Schenk.

Code of ethics to fight corruption

Germany, however, may be one step closer to addressing the follies of the game. The two main sports organizations -- the German Sports Association and the National Olympic Committee -- will merge in May of this year to form one new sports organization: the German Olympic Sports Association. Transparency International-Germany has just asked the new group to begin its work by laying down a code of ethics for athletes and sports clubs and by creating an "ethics commission" to address scandals and promote transparency.

Sports spectators, for their part, can show their dissatisfaction over athletes' doping practices and match-fixing by boycotting games, Schenk suggests.

Louisa Schaefer

[Print](#)