

4.7 New media approaches to tackling match-fixing in Finnish football

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While the magnitude of the problem is not yet known, it is clear that Finland is very vulnerable to match-fixing. The fact that most matches are played in the summer, when other countries' leagues are off-season, draws the attention of match-fixers, while financial difficulties then allow them to influence football clubs and players more easily.²

There are also few deterrents to international fixers. The gathering of sufficient evidence to start investigations is a slow and difficult process, and there are no existing laws or institutions that address match-fixing specifically.³ Instead, cases are either heard under the law of bribery in business (football cases to date) or treated as fraud (for which 20 people were convicted in a high-profile baseball match-fixing case).⁴ To date only five football cases from the men's premier division (Veikkausliiga) and from the lower divisions have ended up before the Finnish courts⁵ and none have progressed to the High Court of Finland.⁶ The absence of a law against match-fixing means that such cases usually result in probation.⁷

This means that international fixers face few risks but can reap high rewards. The most high-profile example was Wilson Raj Perumal, who was sentenced to the maximum two years' imprisonment for match-fixing between 2008 and 2011, then expelled and denied re-entry into Finland on his release. This did not stop him from entering Finland four more times, however. In May 2014 he was finally arrested and sentenced to three months' conditional imprisonment on the grounds of illegal entry and forgery.⁸

Preventative technology

Finland has now woken up to the problem. In 2010 the Finnish professional football players' association (the Jalkapallon Pelaajayhdytys: JPY) established a five-member working group to design a mobile application against match-fixing called the 'Players Red Button'. The final app became part of the 'Don't Fix It' campaign of the Fédération Internationale des Associations de Footballeurs Professionnels (FIFPro), which also features the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), Birkbeck - University of London, and the Finnish Ministry of Culture and Education as partners in the project.⁹

The app was launched in Finland in 2013 and was downloaded by 1,200 Finnish professional football players.¹⁰ Its main purpose is to allow the players to report information about match-fixing cases anonymously and securely. The app is usually downloaded by players in their dressing rooms following JPY presentations against match-fixing. The players are given individual codes to access the app for security reasons.

The app then allows players to report contact from a match fixer or their colleagues or even rumours of potential match-fixing. The information is sent directly to the security company chosen by the JPY.¹¹ The security company processes messages around the clock and, if necessary, forwards the data to the police.¹²

The JPY recognises that the software is just one more tool in the arsenal against match-fixing, and that it does not by itself solve the problem. It also reports that the app has been received in different ways. Younger players tend not to see the need for it, as they have not been exposed to match-fixing, and the idea seems strange; according to the JPY, they have often claimed that they would never need to use the app. Older players, on the other hand, with their greater experience,

understand the significance of the app, and they have been encouraging the JPY to take the idea forward.

If the app is shown to be secure, the plan is to test in eight other EU countries: Italy, Romania, Hungary, Norway, England, Scotland, Greece and Slovenia.¹³

Notes

¹ Annukka Timonen is Chairperson of Transparency International Finland.

² Johanna Peurala, 'Match-Manipulation in Football: The Challenges Faced in Finland', *International Sports Law Journal*, vol. 13 (2013).

³ Police University of Applied Science (2014).

⁴ Peurala (2013).

⁵ JPY (Finland), 'Alhaisilla palkoilla ja ottelumanipulaatioilla selvä yhteys' ['Low salary and match-fixing have clear link to each other'], 28 March 2014, www.jpy.fi/?pageid=136&newsitemid=450 (last accessed 20 August 2014); Peurala (2013).

⁶ Police University of Applied Science, press release 'Rikoslaki puree heikosti jalkapallotulosten vääristelyyn' www.poliisi.fi/poliisi/bulletin.nsf/vwSearchView/919C6FE29379B977C2257C91003C0E3E (last accessed 20 September 2014).

⁷ Police University of Applied Science (2014).

⁸ *Helsingin Sanomat* (Finland), 'Pahamaineinen Perumal kävi Suomessa kahdesti viime syyskuussa' ['Perumal visited Finland twice last September'], 3 June 2014, www.hs.fi/urheilu/a1401769592143 (last accessed 20 August 2014).

⁹ *Helsingin Sanomat*. 'Suomen jalkapallo sai ilmiäntopalvelun' ['Finland has match-fixing denunciation application'], 23 July 2013, www.hs.fi/urheilu/a1374465967454 (last accessed 20 July 2014).

¹⁰ FIFPro (Netherlands), 'Finnish match-fixing app shows its value', 25 April 2014, www.fifpro.org/en/news/finnish-match-fixing-app-shows-its-value (last accessed 20 August 2014).

¹¹ The name of the security company is confidential, for security reasons.

¹² *Helsingin Sanomat* (2013).

¹³ FIFPro (Netherlands), 'FIFPro and Finnish players union test match-fixing app', 16 July 2013, www.fifpro.org/en/news/fifpro-and-finnish-players-union-test-match-fixing-app.