

4.6 Match-fixing: the role of prevention

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The need for prevention measures

The causes of and influences on match-fixing are complex.² Sporting events can be fixed to gain financial advantage or they can be fixed for sporting reasons – that is, to get the desired result. A pervasive culture of cash payments – from referees' travel expenses to players' goal bonuses to agents' transfer fees – reduces misgivings about illegal activity and increases the risk of individuals becoming involved. High wages, abundant free time and exposure to gambling also heighten the vulnerability of professional athletes, while the huge rise of online gambling, in real time and across borders, has led to a sharp increase in activity by organised crime, which sees match-fixing as a low-risk venture with high returns.

When sports organisations started to recognise the problem of match-fixing around 15 years ago, reactions varied. Some sports such as tennis or cricket put prevention programmes in place as early as 2000, but football did not start to tackle match-fixing seriously until 2009, when the big European football betting scandals were uncovered.³ Previously the initial reaction to any allegations had been to call in the police, as the problem was seen to belong exclusively to criminal elements from outside the game. However, no match-fixing can take place without the involvement of individual players, referees or officials, and therefore requires interrelated responses, from adequate legal frameworks and law enforcement procedures to public awareness and the engagement of sport supporters. It is also clear that sport organisations carry the primary responsibility for developing prevention programmes in order to protect their competitions and athletes.

For a long time, however, sport organisations refused to accept this responsibility. Although awareness of the problem has slowly but steadily grown in recent years, even now many organisations require a great deal of persuasion before they put effective prevention measures in place.

Establishing the proper environment for prevention

Many athletes and referees do not appreciate the step-by-step risks of becoming sucked into criminal behaviour, and as a result are easy prey. Raising awareness, education and training for all target groups, including athletes, coaches, referees and officials, are therefore key elements of prevention.

Knowing the problem and recognising the risks

First and foremost, awareness-raising in sport is needed. All people involved - athletes, coaches, referees, officials, parents - should know the danger, where it starts and how to detect it before any manipulation takes place. They should know the specific risks of a particular sport, and which behaviour fosters manipulation; they need to know that there is a link between some habits in sport and match-fixing – such as cash payments, gambling or the manipulation of competitions for sporting reasons. Only through being aware of these challenges is there any chance of successful prevention.

Rules

For prevention programmes to succeed, it is important to have fixed rules and regulations against match-fixing already in place inside the sport organisations, so that administrative sanctions can be applied separately from criminal prosecutions. It should be mandatory for violations to be punished internally, not only as violations of public laws, and this should be known within the sport.

Penalties serve as a preventative deterrent, and athletes and other concerned individuals must be fully informed about these rules and regulations, as well as the consequences for violations.

There is at present no global model of comparable rules for all athletes and others in connection with match-fixing, as there is, for example, in the fight against doping.⁴ In some countries and certain sports, participants are prohibited from betting on the results of the competitions they take part in, and their club's matches. In the case of the German Football League, the Bundesliga, this also extends to friends and relatives of the players.⁵ A global standard could include just such an outright prohibition of athletes and other involved people betting not only on their own competition/league but on their own sport on the whole. Such a rule would be very clear, and it could help to diminish the danger of gambling addiction as well as reducing match-fixing risks.

(INSERT FIGURE 4.2 All bets are off: athletes and gambling HERE)

Ombudsmen and whistleblowing

Whistleblowing is a well-known means for fighting corruption in politics and business, and increasingly in sport, and is important to the success of prevention programmes. Some countries and/or sports already have established whistleblowing systems to report hints of matches being fixed. For example, the Bundesliga established an ombudsman in 2011, to receive information (anonymously, if required), on the one hand, and to consult and assist every involved person, on the other hand.⁶ Such an ombudsman must be independent and obliged to uphold secrecy. It is absolutely necessary that the main focus of attention must be on the protection of whistleblowers, and that any and all regulations to be introduced are working towards this end.

Tone from the top

One of the most important principles in the fight against all kinds of wrongdoing is that the need to behave well applies at all times; in the case of corruption and match-fixing, this means that fair play on the pitch is possible only in connection with fair play off the pitch. How, for example, would a young athlete realise the danger of gambling when the president of his club talks about gambling in

an easy and casual way in public, as if there is no problem of addiction?⁷ How would club officials be able to protect their athletes if they were incapable of paying them? The risks are high when professional athletes are badly paid, or sometimes not paid at all, potentially driving them to match-fixing just to be able to feed their family. Alternatively, how would young athletes get a sense of wrongdoing in daily situations if the officials they report to are making headlines for alleged corruption or other irregularities?

The success or failure of prevention programmes therefore depends on the behaviour of front-line management. To gain credibility, managers have to stick to the rules, to set a good example, to avoid ambiguity, to stand for ethical behaviour and to promote an awareness of the risks involved in sport. This means that the first line of management in federations, associations and clubs has to apply principles of transparency and integrity through systems of good governance if managers really are interested in combating match-fixing.

Content and methods of prevention

Background information

First it is necessary for all potentially involved people to receive background information on the most important issues concerning match-fixing. Basic knowledge for coaches or officials allows them, in turn, to provide advice or train athletes. It is also necessary for athletes themselves to have background information about betting in order to understand the dangers of match-fixing or gambling addiction, or to know how inside information can have a value for individuals seeking to profit from the betting markets. Often there is little awareness about this issue among sportspeople. Inside information can include:

- injury – new injuries to athletes or athletes failing fitness tests;
- team selection – line-ups before the match;

- transfers – players transferred in/out of the club;
- managerial changes – news of who the new manager may be;
- financial problems – clubs not paying players’ wages or other bills;
- motivational issues – such as a club not worried about being knocked out of a cup because promotion is more important to it; and
- any personal situations – such as a fight between players in training.⁸

Athletes should also understand the dangers and consequences of gambling addiction. Coaches, athletes’ parents and teachers at special sport boarding schools should know how to recognise any gambling problem at an early stage.

Box 4.1 Gambling risks within professional football

Current studies⁹ together with some single cases reveal the high risk of gambling addiction on the part of football players because of their particular environment. Players are young, often have a lot of slack time, as on bus trips to away games, and have little to do on these trips, leading to boredom. In combination with the competitive mentality of athletes, and the fact that they are used to taking on risks, this time is often used for games, whether it is poker or card games or internet gambling on sport results. Rush betting can provide an obvious temptation. Additionally, an often large salary at a young age, in comparison to athletes’ peers, can increase recklessness. Athletes who have lost high sums or suffer from gambling addiction then become easy prey for match-fixers, such as German footballer René Schnitzler, who developed a gambling addiction that led him to get involved in match-fixing – as told in the book about his story.¹⁰

Target groups

As athletes very often start their careers at a young age, prevention and education must also begin when they are young. Most of the current prevention programmes start with athletes from 15 or 16

years of age. Programmes should reach athletes taking part in minor competitions, because they are at a high risk. As they are often not well paid by their clubs, or not paid on time, and there is less public attention, they are easier prey for fixers. Education must not be limited to athletes, though: all people involved – coaches, officials, referees and parents – should be integrated into the prevention programmes, and they should know all the important issues and dangers.

Methods

The focus must be on awareness-raising, education and training. A number of countries and sports such as Germany (football), Austria (football) or Lithuania (basketball) have already produced information brochures and flyers, while in Germany, Greece, Croatia and Austria e-learning programmes are being implemented for different target groups, as well as workshops and face-to-face training sessions (Germany, Austria, Italy). Working with case studies and situations encountered on a daily basis should hold out the greatest promise of success. Everyone involved should be made aware of how easy a harmless situation can turn into a critical one. Those taking part in the training sessions should be able to react in a proper way and know where to get help when confronted with critical situations in real life. The methods should be communicative and participative, with all attendees actively taking part; only participation guarantees learning.

These meetings or workshops should take place regularly, at least once a year, not just a single time in a player's career. In the professional German football leagues, for example, prevention programmes are mandatory for youth centres. It is also important for coaches to be aware of the problem in everyday life, in training and on trips to away games. In the case of special boarding schools for athletes, the responsible persons should also be trained on the need for ongoing monitoring and oversight.

Conclusion

Prevention is the most important weapon in the fight against match-fixing. Together with the required rules and a disciplinary system, it is what the sport organisation can do to minimise the risk of result manipulation. When athletes, referees and officials resist, no sporting competition can be manipulated, not even by organised crime. It is not sufficient just to educate athletes, coaches and referees, however. It is also essential to establish a culture of transparency, honesty and integrity in all sectors of sport. Sport organisations have a responsibility to promote good governance, so it has to be introduced and implemented – and seen to be implemented. The principles of fair play and setting a positive example have to be applied in daily life, not just written down in a declaration.

Notes

¹ Ulrike Spitz is a member of the Working Group on Sport of Transparency International Germany.

² 'Match-fixing' is a catch-all term covering both the manipulation of the results of sporting events and one-off incidents during a sporting event (or in direct connection with a sporting event) by one or more persons deliberately losing or acting in a specific way contrary to the laws of the game. The Council of Europe's Convention on the Manipulation of Sport Competitions defines 'manipulation of sports competitions' as 'an intentional arrangement, act or omission aimed at an improper alteration of the result or the course of a sports competition in order to remove all or part of the unpredictable nature of the aforementioned sports competition with a view to obtaining an undue advantage for oneself or for others': chapter 1, article 3, definition no. 4.

³ Guardian (UK), 'Europe hit by 'biggest-ever' match-fixing scandal', 20 November 2009, <http://www.theguardian.com/sport/2009/nov/20/uefa-match-fixing-germany>

⁴ World Anti-Doping Agency (Canada), 'The Code', www.wada-ama.org/en/what-we-do/the-code.

⁵ See http://www.dfb.de/fileadmin/_dfbdam/50986-08_Rechts-Verfahrensordnung.pdf (§1, Nr.2)

⁶ Gemeinsam-gegen-Spielmanipulation.de (Germany), 'Spiel Kein falsches Spiel', http://gemeinsam-gegen-spielmanipulation.de/pdf/Broschuere_Spielmanipulation.pdf.

⁷ Sport.de (Germany), 'Hoeneß feiert Gewinn durch Zockerei', 10 November 2013, www.sport.de/medien/fussball/bundesliga-1/33883-19de9b-52f1-13/hoeness-feiert-gewinn-durch-zockerei.html.

⁸ Transparency International, 'Tackling Match Fixing Needs Good Governance' (Berlin: TI, 2012), <http://blog.transparency.org/2012/09/24/tackling-match-fixing-needs-good-governance>.

⁹ See for example, Heather Wardle and Andrew Gibbons, 'Gambling among sports people', <http://www.thepca.co.uk/assets/files/pdfs/Embargoed%20gambling%20research%5B4%5D.pdf>; ESPN (UK), 'Sport's gambling problems revealed in new research', 3 December 2014, <http://www.espn.co.uk/football/sport/story/375657.html>.

¹⁰ See Wigbert Löer and Rainer Schäfer, *René Schnitzler: Zockerliga: Ein Fußballprofi packt aus* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2011).