

## SPARE WORLD CUP MATCH FIXING MENACE!!

Many issues could be said to undermine or challenge the integrity of sports. While doping has been seen as a leading threat to different kind of sport, another threat that seems less unspoken of exists. This is match fixing. The impact of match fixing affects an entire competition and as once emphasized by the President of the International Olympic Committee, 'Doping affects one individual athlete, but the impact of match-fixing affects the entire competition.'

There have been match fixing scandals in several local and international competitions in basketball, cricket, horse racing, snooker, sumo wrestling, tennis and football.

With the World Cup 2018 starting on 14<sup>th</sup> June, it is noteworthy to limit this discussion to football. One of the worst match fixing scandals in football was when Italian police uncovered evidence that teams including Juventus, Lazio, Milan, Fiorentina and Reggina had all been involved in fixing matches with favourable referees, the repercussions were severe. Juventus, Serie A champions in 2005-06, were stripped of their title and relegated to Serie B; Milan kicked off the next campaign with a 30-point deficit; Fiorentina and Lazio escaped the initial judgment of relegation and were instead booted out of Europe for a year; Reggina president Pasquale Foti was fined £20,000 and banned from football for two-and-a-half years.

Just three days ago, Fahad Al Mirdasi who was one of the five Arab referees designated to officiate this year's World Cup was banned for life in the midst of match fixing. His trouble started ahead of last Saturday's King Cup final between Al Ittihad and Al Faisaly when, according to Saudi Arabian Football Federation, the referee offered to fix the game in favour of Al Ittihad. As a result of this, the Head of referees in Saudi Arabia Mark Clattenburg replaced him for the Cup final. The banned referee is only 32 years old and had what seemed to be a bright future ahead of him, having officiated last year's third spot playoffs between Portugal and Mexico at the Confederations Cup.

While there may be many reasons or motivation for match fixing, the ramifications are wide spread and disappointing to all stakeholders involve and especially the fans. The consequences of match fixing lead to penalties, criminal sanctions and of course a loss of reputational damage.

Having seen this as a potential threat in sport, what are the potential ways of curbing this vice? One way is through strengthening legislation. This will provide a clear understanding to participants in sport regarding acceptable and unacceptable

conduct. The line between betting and match fixing must be made clear with a clear set of guidelines that specify what constitutes betting and an offence. Further, to ensure compliance, there is need to put in place forms of intelligence gathering, investigation and evidence gathering which may be useful in either prevention and detection. These mechanisms need to be more pro-active rather than reactive as has been seen in the past. In recent years, Early Warning Systems (EWS) have been put in place with the leader being FIFA's EWS based in Switzerland. This autonomous and independent organization is there to protect football although it was used at the Olympic games in Beijing on behalf of the International Olympic Committee.

Education and information awareness is also important. Spearheaded by the World Anti Doping Agency, the Sport Accord includes encouragement to provide education: "International federations are encouraged to cooperate with governments and responsible betting operators... [for] the development of a common Education Programme regarding the potential risks related to sports betting, match fixing and international crime."

FIFA has also encouraged participants to come forward with a hotline and website as whistle blowing channels. The organization has committed to protecting whistle blowers with anonymity and immunity from prosecution. The use of anonymous witnesses in match fixing cases was confirmed by the Court of Arbitration for Sports in *FK Pobeda, Aleksandar Zabranec, Nikolce Zdraveski v UEFA* (CAS 2009/A/1920).

FIFA being the second most powerful sports regulating body has also set out to implement policies and spent money looking into the future of this area. Regarding match-fixing, FIFA has promised tighter monitoring of referees' assignments by asking for names of referees for approval two months before the game. The organization intends to create an Anti-Corruption Training Wing to be designed and implemented by Interpol which has been seen as a significant step in guaranteeing integrity of football.

In conclusion, what remains to be seen is whether the sports regulating bodies as well as federations in football will succeed in putting an end to this menace which touches the very core of sportsmanship and integrity.