

MATCH-FIXING: THE CASE OF MALTA

Dr Dawn Aquilina and Dr Angelo Chetcuti
IDHEAP (Swiss Graduate School of Public Administration) University of Lausanne, Switzerland.
dawn.aquilina@idheap.unil.ch

Introduction

One of the major challenges facing world football is the necessity to combat corruption in all its forms, whether on or off the field. With the increasing investment in mega-events, mainly via commercial rights, broadcasting deals, and infrastructure projects, football has become a highly lucrative industry. Moreover, given the widespread popularity of football across the four corners of the globe and its highly marketable nature, it is not surprising that the lure of financial gain has brought with it also a degree of corruptive practices. In a report presented to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Brasseur (2012, p.6) identified match-fixing as one of the most pertinent forms of corruption that is eroding European sports and football in particular. For the purpose of the report, a definition for match-fixing was provided as follows: "illegally influencing the course or the result of a sporting competition in order to obtain advantage for oneself or for others". All stakeholders have a vested interest in ensuring that the credibility and value of sport are not undermined as a result of match-fixing in order for it to prosper in the future. Hence there are varying degrees of responsibilities at all levels, whether it is athletes, officials, administrators, national associations, UEFA and FIFA, as well as states and supranational organs such as the European Union. Maintaining the principles of integrity of competition has become a top-priority challenge for sports associations and federations, particularly with the rapid growth and increased accessibility of online betting and betting exchange. In the light of these issues, this work seeks to provide an overview of recent cases of match-fixing in Malta and of the regulatory environment available to address this phenomenon.

Methodology

Due to the exploratory nature of this study and since the main purpose was to gain a better understanding of how Malta is dealing with match-fixing in football, the case-study approach as advocated by Yin (2003) was deemed the most relevant research method to capture the complexity of this phenomenon in a practical and real-life context. Having secured access to the Malta Football Association (MFA)'s archival material, several documentary sources were utilised including meeting minutes, administrative documents, annual reports, personal letters, press releases and newspaper articles. Primary legal sources, such as the Laws of Malta, court judgments, the MFA's Statute, regulations, and records of disciplinary proceedings were also crucial to this study. Our starting point was, in fact, an analysis of the existing regulatory framework both at national level (namely criminal and specific legislation as well as court judgments) and at association level (mainly association rules and disciplinary decisions). A selection of recent cases of match-fixing was analysed, together with information collected from amongst local clubs and their members, as well as MFA personnel, for a better understanding of the local setting.

Findings / implications

This brief analysis of Malta's experience in relation to match-fixing clearly suggests that, in the main, the medicine to prescribe, both at the individual level as well as at organisation and state level, has a lot in common for large and small countries alike. A three-pillar approach is therefore proposed to combat the growing match-fixing problems in the long term. The first deals with preventive action primarily via education; the second is concerned with better governance; and the third advocates a more proactive and dedicated approach to be taken by the state, particularly the police, who have the required tools and powers to preempt wrongdoing and to investigate suspicious behaviour in depth.

There is surely a lot of space for further research into football governance in smaller countries, especially microstates who very rarely find space in press columns. Balance-sheet figures are certainly much lower, but most problematics are common to those of the big boys. While it is obviously problematic to generalise our findings beyond this immediate Maltese context, the data that we were able to gather does provide a very useful insight into how one small football nation is tackling issues of match-fixing. Therefore, more effort and funding should be directed towards knowledge building and sharing, by bringing closer all the stakeholders involved to provide an appropriate framework for guidance and action in this matter. Research, especially in smaller nations, remains lacking. It is hoped that this research paper will go some way into contributing to this knowledge building and helps to serve as a basis for a series of case-studies on smaller / less visible nations, in order to provide a more accurate account of the scale of match-fixing problems and share evidence of best-practice on how best to protect the integrity of football and sport more broadly in such contexts.

References

- Brasseur, A., 2012. The need to combat match-fixing, Draft resolution adopted by the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, Parliamentary Assembly, Council of Europe.
- Yin, R. K., 2003. Case Study Research: Design and Methods (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.