

Different Diseases Ask for Different Remedies. An Empirical Study and Theoretical Framework on Sport-related and Betting-related Match-fixing in Flanders

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Aim

Match-fixing is gaining rapid attention in both the sports world and academia (Hill, 2013; IRIS, 2014). However, a solid theoretical background to frame this ethical challenge is still missing from literature. This is, nonetheless, important to pinpoint the difficulties and threats of this emerging issue. Therefore, this study aims to present the application of a theory of moral development on the problem of match-fixing. Moreover, the specific challenges that this type of corruption poses are examined in the empirical part of this study.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Ethical behaviour can only be performed when four steps are successfully taken (Rest, 1986). In this study we apply the model of Rest to match-fixing. The first step to be taken is the so-called “moral sensitivity”: the awareness that rigging a match is an ethical issue. Once this realization is made, the person involved needs to establish the “moral judgement” (step 2), i.e. is it permissible to fix a match or not. The third step is provided by the “moral motivation”, when the moral judgment is weighted against other interests, such as winning or financial gain. In the final step, the “moral character”, the action that is decided upon needs to be put in practice. This step can form an obstacle in itself. For instance, the athlete can pose the unethical behaviour, because of external pressure and lack of willpower to go through with the decision he made.

Research Design and Data Analysis

The Rest model offers a firm backbone to assess what is going wrong when an athlete decides to fix a match. Our research questions are aimed at shedding a light on which step(s) in the process form a major obstacle in both types of match-fixing and how athletes render the unethical behaviour in practice. This will allow to work out and implement a solid, effective strategy when it comes to the prevention of both classes of match-fixing.

A mixed method design was used to assess and explain incidents of match-fixing in Flanders. In order to study the characteristics of betting-related and sporting-related match-fixing events, quantitative data were gathered. For this part, three sports federations were selected, namely soccer, tennis, and badminton. All adults of these federations were presented with a anonymized questionnaire on match-fixing suspicions experiences in their sport. Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 24.

To gain insight into the mechanisms and motivations that guide betting-related match-fixing, qualitative data were gathered through a case study. Interview questions were developed from the existing literature on match-fixing.

Results and Discussion

Questionnaires were taken from 614 respondents from soccer, tennis and badminton clubs in Flanders. No less than 138 incidents of (proposed) match-fixing were reported. Of these records, 90% concerned sporting-related fixes, as opposed to 10% of betting-related incidents. 16,6% of the respondents know someone who has been approached to fix a match, whereas 6,5% was contacted personally to rig a match. In both cases, the main stake was to prevent degradation from happening. Mostly the end result was at stake for the fixer, rather than the score or certain events during the match ('spot-fixing'). Most persons involved (66%) kept the information to themselves when they were confronted with facts or suspicions on match-fixing.

Two different types of fixes come into view. On the one hand, we have the sporting-related fix that involves mostly amateur soccer and concerns the manipulation of gain and loss. The most important stake is the prevention of degradation and mostly there are money or consumer goods involved. In our study, no threat was involved when it came to this kind of fixing. We clearly see how the first two steps in the Rest model (moral sensitivity and moral judgment) are compromised in the sporting-related fix. This differs from the betting-related fix, which typically takes place in a variety of sports and at the (semi-)professional level. Next to gain/loss fixing, we also notice that spot-fixing is going on. The stakes are always money and threat and violence are unfortunately not uncommon practices in this type of match-fixing. The moral obstacles, as defined in the Rest model, are moral motivation and moral character in the betting-related variety of match-fixing.

Conclusion and Implications

Our study was able to guide the complex subject of match-fixing with a theoretical framework, namely the model of Rest. Next to this, empirical data made it possible to obtain a clear distinction between the two types of fixing. On the one hand, we have to consider sporting-related betting with its own characteristics and threats, on the other hand attention needs to be given to betting-related fixing and its different features and risks. Both types of corruption demand for different prevention measures, which can be deduced from the model of Rest.

References

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