

# PAYING THE PRICE OF CRITICAL JOURNALISM

by Mikkel Milsgaard



Aggrey Kwendo was a keen participant in the Play the Game conferences since their inception in 1997.

bodyguards at a cost of 500 US dollars to ensure that he was able to leave the country in safety. Three other journalists from Consumers Chronicle should also have boarded the Sabena Airlines plane to Copenhagen, but the risk – and the price – was too high. They stayed at home.

Over the past decade, Kwendo had exposed some of the most corrupt practices in his nation, including the disappearance of money awarded to Kenya Football Federation (KFF) to promote the development of young players. According to Kwendo, at least 40,000 US dollars disappeared during the reign of former KFF Chairman Maina Kariuki and treasurer Levi Obondo.

Through editorials, Aggrey Kwendo has also criticised the government for harassing and intimidating members of the media – especially while Kenya is undergoing crucial political change. Repercussions from these and other stories have caused untold suffering not only to himself but also his family. Anonymous death threats have become a regular occurrence.

While attending the conference in Copenhagen, Kwendo was unable to fully relax due to fears for the safety of his family. After a year of working as the Managing Editor of the Consumers Chronicle – and many more years working with other national newspapers as a correspondent – Kwendo knew exactly what it meant to be a critical journalist in Kenya.

## HOW IT WAS REPORTED:

This article first appeared on the website [www.djh.dk/conferencepulse](http://www.djh.dk/conferencepulse) on 9 November 2005.

Aggrey Kwendo, journalist and Managing Editor at Kenya's Consumers Chronicle dedicated himself to the fight against bribery and corruption. The price he paid was a life of constant vigilance.

While in Copenhagen for the Play the Game conference, Aggrey Kwendo's wife, Dorin, called him from Kenya. She and her four children had been scared by strange men hanging around the family home in Nairobi. Earlier that day, unknown men had knocked on her door and asked to speak to her husband.

Physical confrontations and threats by phone and text messages were the norm for Kenyan Journalist Aggrey Kwendo. Every day he had to be alert, always anticipating retribution by the corrupt powers he was battling against.

When he left Kenya to attend "Play the Game" in Denmark he was forced to hire

# STABBED

Three Greek sports journalists attacked inside one year. The sports community watches silently

by Kirsten Sparre

"Mr. Syrigos, someone tried to kill you. Do you suspect anyone?"

That was the question the Greek police asked sports editor Fillipos Syrigos of the newspaper *Eleftherotipia* on 19 October 2004. The day before Syrigos had been brutally attacked by two men who hit him over the head and stabbed him several times in the back.

Sports journalism has become a dangerous business in Greece with three attacks on sports journalists inside one year. To highlight this unfortunate development, Fillipos Syrigos made the journey from Greece to the Play the Game conference to talk about his ordeal and how it might be linked to his journalism.

In October 2004, Syrigos told the police officer that he had been working on three major reporting issues – all of them sport scandals with the potential to be the reason for the hit against him.

## The stadium

Fillipos Syrigos made himself highly unpopular when he exposed a scam revolving around the Greek Karaiskaki Stadium. Here the president of the Olympiacos Football Company built a lucrative private business on land owned by the state and with money that essentially originated from state funds.

"People thought that Karaiskaki Stadium was owned by Olympiacos. When I revealed in "*Eleftherotipia*" that the stadium was a personal enterprise of Olympiacos president, S. Kokkalis, who owns 99.98% of its shares, there was an uproar mainly among the fans of the team," explains Fillipos Syrigos.

The fans believed Kokkalis to be a benefactor of the team, but they suddenly learned that Olympiacos, when using Karaiskaki Stadium, is required to pay rent to S. Kokkalis' company operating the field.

"In the light of these stirring revelations, the government did not make any statement. Neither did S. Kokkalis but his hecklers spoke for him with insults and disguised threats."

"Before the hit against me, I was in a state of siege for one whole year. After the hit, Olympiacos

## In memoriam

In February 2006, Play the Game was saddened to learn that Aggrey Kwendo had passed away from a lung infection. A courageous journalist committed to furthering honesty in sport, Aggrey Kwendo had participated in Play the Game conferences since 1997. We publish this story written during Play the Game 2005 in honour of his memory.

# IN THE BACK FOR EXPOSING SPORTS SCANDALS



*Sports editor Filippos Syrigos from Greece was almost killed in October 2004 – probably because of his investigative journalism that has turned up a number of scandals.*

was one of the very few organisations which did not express its support to me and kept silent; as did S. Kokkalis,” says Fillipos Syrigos.

## The doping scandal

Syrigos had also reported extensively on the Greek doping scandal at the Olympic Games which involved the two runners Kostas Kenteris and Katerina Thanou and their coach Christos Tzekos.

Syrigos published information that not only had the two athletes and their coach attempted to evade doping control in the run up to the Olympics but the traffic accident the athletes claimed to suffer on the night of 12 August 2004 was a carefully planned hoax.

A third revelation that caused a sensation had to do with the secret dealings between IOC and Tzekos, Kenteris and Thanou that led to the surrender of their accreditation and their withdrawing from the Games, in exchange for a temporary suspension of any action against them.

“At the time when the IOC spokesperson was showing to the television cameras the three accreditation cards and Tzekos, Kenteris and Thanou were stating that they had sacrificed their participation in the interest of Greece, ‘Eleftherotypia’ published all details of what exactly had been agreed the evening before; and television viewers were watching it happen, at that moment, live!” says Fillipos Syrigos.

## Olympic corruption

Finally, Syrigos had turned his journalistic spotlight on the dealings of the sport marketing company, Octagon, that seemed to profit extensively from the owner’s, Yannis Yannakis, close relationship to Gianna Angelopolous, president of the organising committee of the Olympic Games in 2004.

“Investigating the matter since 1998, I gathered admissions, testimonies and information that led to the most likely possibility that Gianna and Theodore Angelopoulos were not without connec-

tion to the activities of Yannakis and his company that was renamed from ACT to Sport Marketing OCTAGON,” explains Fillipos Syrigos.

Syrigos explains that when he published the information he had gathered, several things happened in quick succession.

On 5 October 2004, Theodore and Gianna Angelopoulos sued Syrigos and his newspaper claiming damages of 10 million Euros. On 18 October 2004, Syrigos was attacked. And on 24 November 2004, Syrigos and ‘Eleftherotypia’ was sued again – this time by Yannis Yannakis who claimed damages of seven million Euros.

## Culprits are still at large

Filippos Syrigos does not want to point the finger at any of these potential suspects without proper evidence. However, more than a year after the assault the Greek police has still not arrested anyone for the attack that nearly cost the sports journalist his life.