

Play the Game 2005 Conference Magazine

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More facts about Play the Game on page 46-47 and at

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RESCUING SPORT FROM ITSELF

By Jens Sejer Andersen, Director of Play the Game



Perhaps our moods should have been more jubilant in November 2005 when we had just finished our 4th Play the Game conference. We had seen a bigger and more enthusiastic crowd of participants, wider media exposure round the globe and heard thought-provoking inputs from a greater number of speakers than on any earlier conference ... what more could we ask for?

The reason that we did not dissolve in euphoria derived from the success itself. If our aim was to draw attention to the widespread and many-faced corruption in sport, we could claim "mission completed" with much more strength than it was pleasant to think of.

One by one, the speakers had thrilling, colourful and captivating stories to tell. But when the pieces were put together, they merged into a deeply disturbing picture of a world of sports in trouble.

Corruption in sport may turn out to exist on a scale which will make sport leaders think with nostalgia on the image crisis they faced during the doping scandals in the 1990's.

Be it at a local, national or international level, sports organisations have not been prepared to protect themselves, their members and their core values against the flipside of the economic bonanza that has hit sport in almost every corner on the globe over the past 30 years.

Once based on idealism and voluntary work, the sports system has proven vulnerable to the temptations of personal greed – and in recent years also to the penetration by organised crime.

Sport provides a fertile breeding ground for those who prefer to work in the shadows. The market for sports drugs among elite athletes and in the fitness sector is a billion-dollar business opportunity. The fortunes at stake in rich soccer clubs inspire dubious leaders to influence the next match in the tournament.

The distance from match influencing to match fixing is short. Through the Internet, powerful criminal groups can bet on matches in lower ranking clubs in distant countries – clubs that are controlled or influenced by the bandits themselves. In too many countries, high-ranking sport leaders lend a hand to those who fix matches and collect their reward in terms of money or political backing.

Those who dare to speak out in order to bring sport back on its idealistic track are often ignored, marginalised, ridiculed and threatened by sport itself. On a few occasions, they are also assaulted or even killed. For these people, sport is a dangerous place to be.

Sport is being robbed at daylight. The perpetrators not only steal the money that belongs to the athletes of this world. They steal the future of the youth, and they steal the very idea of sport.

Whether confronted by greedy individuals or organised crime, it is time that sports leaders wake up and realise that corruption cannot be stopped by fiery speeches or ethical charters that no one respects in reality.

Like doping, corruption is multi-sport and multi-national. Like doping, corruption must be fought by building international alliances to save sport from itself and to protect society from the detrimental side effects of modern sport.

As a first step towards building such an alliance, Play the Game has joined forces with the global network Transparency International. During our latest conference, anti-corruption activists and experienced sports leaders wrote a Statement for Integrity and Anti-Corruption in Sport which you can find on pages 18-19.

The statement describes the responsibilities that rest with sports federations, the International Olympic Committee, players, coaches, sponsors, politicians and the media when it comes to combating corruption in sport.

It is our hope that this statement will serve as a useful tool and inspiration for anyone laying out future anti-corruption strategies in sport. Corruption is not a natural disaster that we have to accept and live with. It is a human behaviour that each of us can change.

Meanwhile, we invite you study this magazine and the journalistic summaries of what happened during Play the Game 2005. On our website www.playthegame.org you can find even more information and read presentations in full.

Although some of the stories may cause mixed emotions, we wish that you may enjoy the reading and hopefully get inspired to go out and ... Play the Game.