

The Very Reverend, Vice-Chancellor, colleagues and friends,
distinguished guests, followers in Cyberspace, ladies and gentlemen:

It is exactly two weeks ago today that a young Austrian man came forward and said:

“I will not go on leading a double life that is based only on lies.”

Very few people would probably have taken notice of this rather unsurprising promise from a 27 year old man, if it was not for the fact that these words meant that one of the most promising talents of world cycling, Bernhard Kohl, was ending his career definitively.

Like an endless number of other young elite athletes who have been caught in doping tests, Kohl could have expressed his outrage over the testing results, denied all involvement, declared himself more innocent than the holy virgin and vowed to resume the career as soon as possible.

But no, Kohl gave up a profitable future because the cost of the prize money became too high. He saw no way of fulfilling his ambitions in sport while sticking to the truth. As Bernard Kohl added when leaving his sport:

“I doped voluntarily – in a system in which you cannot win without doping.”

I wonder what we are most provoked by in Kohl’s statements. Is it that he claims that doping is required to succeed in top sport? I guess not. After 11 years of public doping debate, we are hardly surprised by having our suspicions confirmed once again.

No, the real provocation comes from Kohl saying that sport and truth are incompatible.

Is that really true?

I hope it isn't, for a variety of reasons. One of the fundamental qualities of sport, whether we practice it or watch it, is that it provides us with simple moments of truth. The result never lies, it is said. If you hit the goalpost, you hit the goalpost. If you stumble before the finishing line, you stumble.

But most importantly, it is an intrinsic part of human nature to seek for undeniable and final truths. To this end we have created religions, and in this quest for truth splendid buildings like this one have been built.

It would be a pity if sport must alienate itself from this side of human nature. I am aware that some of today's most prominent sports leaders like Juan Antonio Samaranch and Sepp Blatter, have declared that sport is bigger and more important to people than religion.

But can we believe in sport?

In Play the Game's view, no. Sport can enrich our life in many ways, it brings joy, intensity, challenges, self-conscience, skills, friendship, identity and a number of other wonderful qualities to our living.

But sport does not offer any ultimate truth. If the qualities of sport are to come true for each and every one of us, we cannot just take

orders from above, we must take part in creating our own and our shared sporting life.

This is why Play the Game insists that all matters concerning sport must be subject to an open, direct and fact based dialogue. And this is why we are so grateful that so many join us this week to help us find not one, but many truths about sport.

Unfortunately, those who rule sport today are not so keen to share their thoughts and their truths with us.

The young cyclist Bernhard Kohl has a point:

Over the past almost 40 years of sport and media globalisation, the money, the national pride, the political prestige and the personal career opportunities have grown to such magnitude that those involved in sport have too much to lose to risk telling the truth.

It is an old proverb that the first victim of war is truth, but we may update it and say that truth is also falling victim to sport.

Fortunately, Play the Game has very little money, little prestige at stake and offers extremely few career opportunities, so we are in an ideal position for giving sport some advice and reconcile it with the idea of truth.

Over and over again, we have invited those who are responsible for world sport, those in charge of Olympic Games worldwide and in cities close to Coventry, those who represent hundreds of millions of athletes and sports lovers.

We have invited them to give their version of the truth, so we can together paint as clear and detailed picture of the challenges as possible.

Unfortunately, these world sports leaders have a very busy schedule, and the more difficult challenges we discuss, the more busy the schedule.

But the challenges to modern sport won't go away just by ignoring them.

Many of them remain so constant, that we were a bit worried when we were planning this edition of Play the Game, only one and a half years after we last met in Iceland. Would there be any news worth travelling for?

Yes, just like athletes have a fascinating ability to constantly produce new achievements, new records, higher speed and stronger bodies – sometimes with a bit of technical assistance – sports leaders, too, have a magnificent capacity to produce a reality that go beyond imagination.

It is for instance only a little more than one year ago that a Swiss court proved that over 12 years, from 1989 to 2001, bribes worth at least 138 million Swiss Franc – in today's exchange rate around 75 million British Pounds – were paid as secret personal commissions, or bribes if you will, to a limited number of sports leaders in some of the most powerful sports organisations.

The money was paid out from the then biggest sports marketing company in the world, the ISL, which went bankrupt in 2001. Its

former directors did nothing to deny these events in court, because at the time such bribery was not illegal at all in Switzerland.

On the contrary the former directors confirmed: It was part of the daily business, an indispensable tool if ISL wanted to acquire the tv and marketing rights of FIFA and other major players on the global sports market.

Curiously enough, in spite of being the biggest and most well-documented corruption scandal in sport known to this date, there has been no reaction at all from the involved international federations and the IOC.

And although tens of thousands of journalists cover sport every day, fewer among them than I can count fingers on this hand has bothered to ask simple questions like: Who took the money? For what purpose? Are they still holding important positions in sport? And are massive bribes still "all in a days work at the office" in the sports federations?

I can assure you that these questions will be asked in the week to come, and perhaps, with a joint, concerted and patient effort we can together find the answers in the years ahead.

Also from the doping front stories emerge that cannot leave any human heart untouched. For instance, about one month ago, a government report in Germany confirmed that doctors, renowned sports physiologists, for almost ten years had run an advanced doping-programme for the German Team Telekom cycling squad.

These doctors were employed at the University of Freiburg that received state money for anti-doping research, and although they had sworn to protect the health of human beings, they had no scruples injecting clearly damaged blood into the veins of their athletes. Did anybody say that a cynical view of athletes died with the German Democratic Republic some twenty years ago?

Last but not least, the past year has seen a growing conscience in world sport about the perils of match fixing. Here, the sports organisations have relatively quickly understood that match fixing is a bullet aiming precisely at the heart of their own business.

If sport loses its unpredictability, the uncertainty of the outcome, everything is lost – every cultural, moral, entertainment, gambling and business value is reduced to zero.

According to experts, illegal gambling in Asia may account for more than 100 billion dollars in revenues. If only a tiny percentage of these fortunes is set aside to organise match fixing around the world, then it is still a huge budget for fixers.

Declan Hill will tell you how fixers operate, later this afternoon. Superstars may have such fortunes that they are impossible to bribe, but over the world there may be thousands of poor professional and semi-professional sports people who choose to say with Oscar Wilde: I can resist everything except temptation.

It is no wonder that there is a growing demand in world sport for establishing an international body against corruption in sport. Play the Game suggested such an initiative almost three years ago and we welcome the new trend, but we would also like to add a warning.

If the effort of an anti-corruption institution is focused only on match-fixing, then it will miss a very important area of interest, namely corruption in the corridors.

That will be the same kind of historic injustice that we have seen in the anti-doping struggle, all its qualities untold. The battle against the evils of sport tends to focus only on athletes, on those who deliver the sport themselves. Their morality and blood parameters are under daily scrutiny.

But we must not forget that the athletes are only parts of a much bigger system. These young people are surrounded by trainers, managers, physiotherapists, doctors, agents, advisers, organisation officials, sponsors, journalists and media consumers – grown up and mature people who all exercise an extremely strong influence on a young, ambitious, inexperienced and vulnerable person.

In the fight against doping and corruption, it is high time that we turn the spotlight to the sports leaders and hold them accountable for the health and well-being of the sporting system.

The world sports leaders claim over and over that they protect the health of nations, that they bind communities together, that they bring social, cultural and ethical values to us and most especially to our children.

If they want us to entrust them these important tasks, they must come forward like Bernhard Kohl and add their facts and viewpoints to the open debate about what is true and what is good.

If the sports leaders continue to focus on entertainment sport only, if they refuse the public access to information, if they deny to take part in public debates that are not controlled by themselves, how can we trust them?

May I use this occasion to thank all those in Coventry for their contribution to make this event happen. Thanks to Coventry University for having shown the courage to bid for Play the Game 2009 and embark with us on a quite demanding mission. Thanks to Advantage West Midlands, the regional development body, who in an early phase gave a generous contribution, and shortly afterwards raised it again, thus ensuring the financial foundation for our partners and their efforts at this conference.

As we do know that bribing is important in sport, especially also for all of you Play the Game delegates, we are grateful to the clothing company SEN sport for providing the gifts that ensures that nobody will criticise the organisers in the days ahead.

A warm thanks to Coventry City and CV One for their hospitality and commitment – the result of which you can see at the university square and experience at the reception tonight.

A very special thank go to more than 50 student volunteers who will be with us, rendering an invaluable help to the sessions and backstage, and some of them also providing instant coverage of the conference on a specially designed homepage. Please treat them kindly.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank the 120 speakers and an equal number of delegates who have decided to spend their time,

their commitment and for the big majority also their own money to come here. Not one speaker returns with a fee in his or her pocket, you are all here as a gesture to ensuring transparency, democracy and freedom of expression in sport.

I hope that the week will prove worthwhile for you all. I hope we will see many interesting and inspiring disagreements unfold under the motto:

Your worst opponent is your best teacher.

In that spirit it is a great pleasure to welcome you all to embark on a truly open, unrestricted and fact-based dialogue on how we create a better sport, a sport that reaches out not only those who are rich on talent, money and power, but everybody with a desire to play, have fun, make friends and make life worth living.

Let's get started, let's Play the Game.