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Corruption and Sport: Building Integrity and Preventing Abuses

Whenever there is money, competition or power involved, corruption is a constant threat. The sporting industry is not immune from this reality. From match-fixing to stadium construction kickbacks, the sporting world has seen a string of corruption scandals that has tarnished its reputation. Although the Olympic Charter states that it “seeks to create a way of life based on (...) the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles”, many sports organisations have not yet adopted effective approaches to deal properly with the problem of corruption and sport.

The close-knit relationship between sporting officials, politicians, business people, sponsors and the media can create a high-risk context for corruption to occur. Additionally, low levels of transparency and accountability across the sporting industry are too frequent and widespread not to be addressed. Without changes to this status quo, the development of a comprehensive response to tackle corruption risks and build integrity in sport will be compromised.

EURO 2012: A Test Case

Preparations for the European football championships EURO 2012, to be jointly hosted in Poland and Ukraine, is of special interest given the impact that the event could have on the image of football. The EURO 2012 could help the Polish and Ukrainian football federations to overcome corruption allegations from the past and could promote greater integrity in the sport. At the same time, the occurrence of a corruption scandal could compromise the sport for years.

The risk of abuses occurring is considered high, given the low levels of transparency and accountability in each country, and past problems in the sport. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2008, Ukraine falls within the lowest quarter of 180 countries studied, receiving a similar score as Comoros, Nicaragua and Pakistan.⁵

While Poland's rank for perceived levels of corruption in the country is much better, recent cases in sport show the Polish sporting industry's vulnerability to abuses. According to reports in the media in 2008, it was found that up to half of all the country's first- and second-league football matches over the last four years may have been rigged.⁶

The UEFA and the Polish government have struggled to find the right way to deal with match-fixing and bribery, practices that allegedly are spread widely throughout the Polish football community.⁷ UEFA threatened to suspend the Polish national team after the government, in trying to break up these alleged networks within the country's football association, forced the elected national football president to step down in October 2008.⁸

These developments shed light on the difficulties of maintaining the autonomy of sporting organisations while trying to ensure integrity in their structure and governance.

1. Winners and losers: What's at stake?

The sporting industry is an influential and multi-billion dollar business. Globally, billions of people watch events like the Olympic Games or the FIFA World Cup. Locally, millions of people practise their favourite sport, attend national and local competitions or follow sports through the media. This high level of participation influences local politics, economies and culture and underscores the importance of local sport for youth, health, social life and national identity.

Television rights, sponsorships and infrastructure projects have turned the sporting industry into a lucrative business. For example, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) earned approximately US \$1.7 billion (€1.1 billion) from the television rights for the Beijing Summer Olympic Games in 2008.¹ In the European Union (EU), the sporting industry is estimated to account for up to 3,65 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP). Fifteen million jobs are tied to it, representing over five per cent of the EU labour market.² In terms of tourism, one-quarter of all hotel stays by EU tourists are sport related.³ In countries such as the Ukraine, nearly two per cent of the government budget is dedicated to fund sport while in Finland proceeds from the national lottery (Veikkaus) provide more than €100 million annually for the sector.⁴

Yet in some countries, low levels of managerial, organisational, financial and marketing skills create an environment in which abuses and risks can occur, which undermine the integrity of the sporting industry. Similarly, organisational structures may not support practices that would be considered accountable and transparent. In many instances, excessive responsibility, power and money have been given to individuals, whose main credentials may be their status as former athletes or club leaders. A lack of integrity in the sporting industry may endanger sport's most essential elements and core values: fair play, ethics, mutual respect and trust in the rules of the game.

There is an urgent need to protect and promote the integrity of athletes, sports organisations and the entire industry if sport is to continue its original role of setting a higher ethic and standard. New regulations, reforms and initiatives in sport should target the areas where the risk of misconduct is high and levels of transparency and accountability are low. These problems tend to be starkest when it comes to how the sporting industry deals with match-fixing, the influence of organised crime, governance, transfers, construction, sponsorships and the media.

Match-fixing. 'Match-fixing' in its most basic form remains a serious problem in many sports and at many levels. National, club and personal pride and prestige can make it too tempting to refrain from improving one's chances. For example, late in a season, a team whose ranking could go up or down may entice an opponent whose ranking is set to throw the match.

Across the sporting spectrum from horseracing to tennis, the main targets of match-fixing are judges, referees, trainers and competitors who abuse their positions for personal gain. In March 2009, the European Handball Champions League was shocked by claims of alleged match-fixing during the 2007 finals as well as the news that two of its referees from Germany had previously been

found returning from an international match in Russia with an unexplainable US \$ 50,000 (€40,000) hidden in their luggage. The two German referees have since been suspended for five years by the European Handball Federation (EHF) for not informing the organisation of the improper offer of money made to one of the referees before the aforementioned match, and not reporting to the EHF the incident that occurred at Russian customs.⁹ More recently, a top-level referee and an assistant were detained by Polish police in July 2009 for their role in a 2005 bribery scandal in Poland's national football league, which has already resulted in 230 people being charged.¹⁰

As these incidents show, even in countries with low levels of corruption in other sectors and with a good ranking in the TI Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), sports teams and players may be implicated in abuses (see side bar). The conviction in 2005 of Robert Hoyzer, a national football league referee in Germany, exposed the links between betting and the use of referees to rig games.¹¹ During that same year, referees, players and coaches in Brazil, Czech Republic, Italy, Poland, Slovakia and Turkey were also convicted of match-fixing while similar allegations were being pursued by the police in another nine countries.¹²

The European Union and other international organisations, as well as international sporting associations like *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA), the International Tennis Federation (ITF), the International Cricket Council (ICC) and Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), have started to deal with the problem of match-fixing and are working closely together with the betting industry. But few national sports associations seem to see it as their task to address match-fixing as part of promoting integrity in sport. In the meantime, the accusations and cases continue.

Organised crime. Organised crime is often the force behind the betting scandals that have tarnished the reputation of sport. Yet another, more alarming set of issues is how the buying of clubs and players, purchasing of image rights, sponsoring of teams and securing of advertising arrangements are being used by organised crime to launder funds. A report by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a group which usually deals with issues related to integrity breakdowns in banks, highlights the infiltration of money laundering activities into the football sector through complex techniques — including the use of cash, cross border transfers, tax havens and front companies, among others.¹³ The FATF has detected more than 20 cases of football-related money laundering activities in 25 countries.¹⁴ Vulnerabilities in the sector's financing and due diligence practices, culture and structure are seen by Transparency International as creating an environment conducive to money laundering by organised crime. These features carry across virtually all sports given the opportunity the industry presents to convert dirty money into non-cash assets and convert small bills into large ones.

Governance. Weak governance structures lacking in transparency and accountability fail to prevent such abuses from starting within sporting organisations. There is generally a low level of transparency in many sport associations when it comes to publicly sharing information and documentation. This often linked to the disclosure practices of team owners — who are often

When match-fixing occurs, it not only affects team standings but a US \$290 billion global gambling industry that includes sporting events from boxing and American football, to ice hockey and cricket. In the US state of Nevada alone, an average of US \$3 billion is wagered yearly on races and sports.¹⁵

In Denmark, the Danish Football Association (DBU) surveyed players on their experiences with bribery but then opted not to make the findings public. Results showed that 11 per cent of those surveyed knew of clubs that received some illegal benefit in connection with a football match and 29 per cent said that they believed match-fixing was growing in Denmark.¹⁶

When a Danish journalist later obtained a copy and published the findings, the only response from the DBU was that they did not understand the public's interest in the report.

Buying Good Test Results

In Austria, Lisa Hütthaler, a national triathlon athlete, confessed to doping and claimed to have attempted to bribe an employee of an anti-doping laboratory to hide her positive test result.²¹

Another Austrian, cyclist Bernard Kohl, has even levelled charges against laboratories accredited by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) after he reported that his former manager allegedly bribed scientists working there.²²

individuals or companies. This characteristic is troubling given the process for making internal decisions and conducting elections in national and international sport organisations. Board members of international federations as well as members of working committees are often expected to vote unanimously, with dissenting votes not registered in the minutes. Such practices prevent any real accountability, both for the boards and for sport in general. Money distributed by international sport federations is often provided with little or no oversight, creating risks of corruption. Similar to political contests, funds that are unaccounted for can provide opportunities to easily 'buy' votes during election times in associations. For example, the British press has accused representatives from Bahrain of misusing FIFA funds to purchase votes in order to take over the highly contested presidency of the Asian football federation.¹⁷

Weak governance may also hinder efforts to effectively deal with one of the biggest problems facing modern sport: doping. According to a survey conducted across the EU, doping was ranked as being the number one threat to sport (72 per cent of respondents), followed by commercialisation (55 per cent) and corruption (41 per cent).¹⁸ Doping offences can be facilitated by corruption and the lack of oversight provided of teams and players. Corrupt practices can be used to gain access to and purchase illegal substances — sometimes drugs that have not even been officially released on the market — and to hide illegal actions (see side bar).

Transfers. Attention should also be drawn to how corruption and improper influence can be used to facilitate the transfer of players. The one-year transfer ban issued by FIFA in September 2009 against the UK football club Chelsea for allegedly encouraging a player from a French team to break his contract early and join their squad reveals how sporting clubs and agents may be willing to engage in improper dealings when it comes to player negotiations.¹⁹

In the case of agents, these individuals often assume an important role for players in many sports, especially those that involve team competition. For a fee, they help players find teams and negotiate their transfer and employment contracts. Yet they may abuse this entrusted position for personal gain. Agents are very often paid by teams rather than players and do not transparently represent conflicts of interest, such as pushing players into transfers to 'churn' the market and produce more commissions for themselves.

Concerns about agents and how corruption and illegal behaviour are plaguing transfers have lead FIFA to launch an online anti-corruption system that will track the flow of money involved in these deals. The aim is to have it in use by all 208 football nations by 2010 in order to eliminate rogue agents, illegal payments and money laundering from the transfer market.²⁰

Construction. Large-scale international sporting events often require speedily constructed venues. This, combined with low levels of transparency and high levels of funding, creates a situation in which corruption can thrive. In Czech Republic, a criminal charge against the organisers of the FIS (International Ski Federation) Nordic World Ski Championship 2009 in Liberec was submitted by the country's supreme auditing office over allegations of fraud and the violation of

proper procurement procedures.²³ Similar allegations of misconduct in stadium construction are plaguing preparations for the FIFA World Cup 2010 in South Africa, where the government's budget for sport has increased four-fold in the lead up to the event.²⁴ The murder of a whistle blower in 2009 after he alerted local officials about alleged corruption in constructing one of the World Cup stadiums makes the risks in these situations too often a reality.²⁵

In the Ukraine, local officials in Lviv, one of the bidding cities for the Euro 2012, have stood up against alleged abuses, refusing to sign an agreement to construct a new stadium after the Austrian company that won the tender allegedly increased the costs by more than 40 per cent.²⁶ The Winter Olympic Games to be held in 2014 in Sochi (Russia) are suffering from similar worries about irregular bidding processes as well as fears that the lack of transparency and prevalence of corrupt practices could lead to uncontrolled construction that would damage the area's pristine surroundings.²⁷

Sponsorship. Until now, the issue of corruption in sponsorship has not been connected to broader concerns of corporate responsibility and transparency. Sponsorship involves the giving of money to events and teams, often in return for branding opportunities and special privileges, such as VIP tickets.²⁸ There is a general lack of transparent and uniform reporting by companies on what funding is given to which event and what team, and how corporate tickets are distributed, to politicians among others. Without such disclosures, there is a risk that companies may be using these decisions to later pressure governments and politicians to pass policies that would be favourable for their business.

Media. Sport journalists and even newspapers and television stations (particularly through sponsorships) may be closely connected with sport clubs, event organisers or sporting associations in a relationship that could be vulnerable to corruption. The independence and impartiality of journalists makes them essential partners in exposing and fighting corruption in sport. However, such a positive role can be put at risk when they become involved in organising the press centre for a sporting event, prepare its press releases and write articles about it and the athletes involved. Given the opacity of the sporting industry, the close links between the media and events can also breed other abuses. In many countries, important matches of the national team(s) are sold to private television channels in a less-than-clear bidding process. While the sale of the rights makes money for the federations, it may come at the high price of corruption and accusations of misdoings (see side bar).

2. Integrating anti-corruption work into sport

Many of these topics relate to work in which the anti-corruption movement is already engaged – i.e. addressing risks and promoting transparency and integrity. However until now sport has not been a special focus of concern.

The prominent public profile and publicity that sport receives, globally and locally, have the potential to support as well as undermine the fight against corruption if it is not properly addressed. If people get accustomed to seeing corruption in sport, they may begin to lose hope in changing the situation they face in other areas of

Broadcasting Corruption

In March 2008, a Swiss court produced evidence that the International Sport and Leisure Company (ISL) had paid officials from a number of sport federations €37.5 million (US \$135 million) in exchange for winning broadcasting rights between 1989 and 2001.²⁹

While three convictions were handed down regarding embezzlement and the falsification of documents, the six former ISL executives indicted in this case were cleared of most of the other charges. The court ruled that there was insufficient evidence to prove the payments were bribes.³⁰

Despite the controversy surrounding the case, one of the cleared ISL managers, Jean-Marie Weber, who was accused of bribing FIFA executive committee members and convicted of embezzlement, has since been elected to the Olympic Journalists Association (OJA).³¹

TI Chapters Playing the Anti-Corruption Game in Sports

Argentina. The TI chapter in Argentina, Poder Ciudadano has prepared guidelines for sporting organisations to adopt in order to promote more transparent and accountable administration and leadership. Recommendations include regular asset disclosure by directors and publishing of budgets and procurement processes.³²

Italy. The TI chapter in Italy has focused on education and cooperation with schools and has hosted roundtables that bring together government officials, civil society organisations and athletes to discuss mechanisms to better encourage and enforce ethics and integrity.

Kenya. The TI Kenya chapter served as a referee when the election process of the Kenyan Football Federation (KFF) broke down and became mired in accusations of corruption, alleged bribery and embezzlement. To promote better ethics and transparent practises, the chapter even organised its own 'transparency' football matches with local teams.³³

Switzerland. In Switzerland, the national chapter has raised awareness of corruption in sport through the publication of articles in the media and has organised round table talks with referees, leaders from sporting associations and representatives of the media.

society that also are plagued by abuses. Yet if the sporting industry can successfully recognise the risks posed and tackle the current problems, combating corruption in different aspects of daily life could be bolstered.

Part of the work on sport and corruption must focus on how governments behave. Many governments use the success of their athletes and good performance at international sporting events as a proxy to prove their power as a nation. Countries, often with low levels of transparency and accountability, focus particularly on competition in sporting events in order to put their country on the international map and use these events as an act of national pride and state building. International sporting organisations use the global fascination with sport and its heroes to help build up sporting teams and infrastructure in developing countries. However, this should happen in a transparent way. Otherwise, structures that create corruption risks could be supported or established instead of being reformed.

The other side of anti-corruption work must look at how the structure and operation of clubs and teams are contributing to low levels of transparency, accountability and integrity. The claim for autonomy from the state may protect national sport bodies from being politically misused but it also may prevent accountability in their decision-making processes. High levels of public funding are given to sport through governments in most countries. Yet a lack of oversight means that an important part of the economy and a sizeable share of public funds are not sufficiently being disclosed and often are left free from adequate controls — both by professional associations or democratically-elected bodies.

Several national chapters of Transparency International have started to work with governments and associations in addressing sport and corruption. They aim to promote higher levels of transparency, accountability and integrity that are lacking (see side bar).

3. Changing the game: Challenges and opportunities

Moving the agenda forward on sport and corruption will depend on the ability of sporting authorities, team owners, event rights holders, sponsors and all key actors to take decisive actions that promote transparency, accountability and integrity in their decisions and policies.

Initiatives to promote such a response could be based on the areas identified as high-risk for corruption and areas in which clear anti-corruption policies could help to shift the rules of the game. The following interventions are possible ideas for implementing the work:

Match-Fixing

- Adoption of anti-corruption instruments, such as TI's Business Principles for Countering Bribery, to collaborate with the international gaming industry to prevent abuses and corruption.

Organised Crime

- Partnerships with international organisations and anti-corruption/anti-fraud entities nationally, regionally (i.e. the EU) and globally that can address international crime in sport, especially in connection with the betting industry.

Governance

- 🌐 Partnerships between civil society organisations and sporting associations, events and teams in activities that promote increased accountability and help to produce good practice guidelines and other initiatives.
- 🌐 Promotion of the values provided by sport and their use in educational initiatives, especially in collaboration with young athletes.
- 🌐 Establishment of anti-corruption approaches in international sporting organisations, such as in their charters, constitutions and codes of conduct for members.
- 🌐 Promotion of due diligence and transparency on the part of team and club owners.

Transfers

- 🌐 Promotion of clear regulations and transparency in player transfers and the employment market.

Construction

- 🌐 Use of integrity pacts and similar citizen-monitoring mechanisms for infrastructure projects and all contracting done as part of large sporting events.
- 🌐 Implementation of 'bidding integrity pacts' for the awarding of sporting events, including the selection of cities and countries as hosts. For example, this could be used as part of the process for determining the city to host the Olympic Winter Games in 2018 (which will be decided in 2011, with interested cities having to enter their bids in 2009). Equally, the FIFA World Cups for 2018 and 2022 will be decided in December 2010 and the host country for EURO 2016 in 2010.
- 🌐 Provision of oversight of state funds, such as those being used for EURO 2012, and monitoring of the effectiveness of preparatory work for key events, especially regarding construction projects, decision-making processes and flow of funds.

Sponsorships

- 🌐 Awareness-raising among sporting associations, teams, coaches, players and citizens that close links between politics and sporting organisations/leaders can lead to corrupt practices.
- 🌐 Development of a code of conduct and rules for the use of VIP invitations, ticket distribution and how rights to sporting events are awarded.
- 🌐 Promotion of ethics in sport as part of sponsors' corporate responsibility programmes.

Media

- 🌐 Awareness-raising in the media to highlight their important role in tackling unethical behaviour and corruption in sport and the risks associated with loss of media independence.
- 🌐 Partnerships between CSOs and journalists to address corruption in sport and media's own related work in terms of transparency (or lack thereof), such as when selling television rights for events.

Corruption and sport: building integrity and preventing abuses

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