

Towards an entity countering crime, corruption, and other integrity breaches in sport

A proposal by the ClearingSport project



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and other integrity breaches in sport

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Layout
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Edition
1st edition, March 2025
2nd edition, September 2025

Front page photo
Joe Skipper/Getty Images

Timeline photos pages 4-5
Andreas Rentz/Getty Images
SOPA Images/Getty Images
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Vianney Thibaut/Agence Zoom/Getty Images
Thomas Søndergaard/Play the Game
Buda Mendez/Getty Images
Mark Runnacles/Getty Images
Gallo Images/Getty Images

ISBN
978-87-94468-48-0 (pdf)
978-87-94468-71-8 (print)

Print
Dantryk

Publisher
Play the Game
Frederiksgade 78B, 2.
DK-8000 Aarhus C
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W: www.playthegame.org

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Contents

Introduction Sport: A public good under threat	3
The problem Crime and corruption in sport	10
Our proposal Towards an entity	14
1. Collaborative framework	16
2. Global regulator	20
3. Investigations	24
4. Dispute management alternatives	28
FAQ A concept for an entity	30
Epilogue	34

Introduction

Sport: A public good under threat

Sport in all its shapes – from the local grassroots level to the highest global elite – has an unrivalled potential to transmit human values such as equality, teamwork, social cohesion, respect for values, rules and laws, community spirit and solidarity, as well as fun and enjoyment for both athletes and spectators.

Worldwide, sport is recognised as a public good, and as such it should belong to those who enjoy it as practitioners or audiences. The structure of most sports organisations should ensure that sport is run by its members and embedded in a democratic culture.

However, in recent years the qualities of sport have come under threat. The explosive commercial growth of sport has created an industry that attracts and allows crime and corruption to flourish.

Alongside other pressing issues, match manipulation, systemic doping, financial fraud, and corruption among sports officials have become widespread. Moreover, the many forms of athlete abuse are revealed with increasing frequency across all sports disciplines.

These developments not only destroy the trust in sport’s governing bodies; they undermine the positive impact of sports activity and challenge the rule of law. These damages hold profound consequences with immeasurable costs to individuals and society, alongside significant economic costs for sport and public authorities.

It is time to reverse these developments and push back the forces that jeopardise sport as a public good.

Since the start of the century, numerous measures and considerable investments have intended to protect athletes, officials, and communities from the harmful effects of corrupt and criminal behaviour. To name a few, sports organisations have created ethical committees and codes of conduct. State authorities have tightened laws that affect sport. Transnational organisations have produced innumerable resolutions and recommendations. Despite good intentions, these efforts too often fail because rules and regulations are not enforced.

That’s why we initiated the ClearingSport project.

Timeline

A selection of events inspiring the ClearingSport project*

- Examples of scandals
- Examples of governance reform
- Examples of good practice
- Foundations of ClearingSport



*See the full timeline online at www.clearingsport.org

The ClearingSport project

Over the past 25 years, different actors have suggested a stronger coordination of efforts to address integrity issues in sport. In 2022, experts called on Play the Game to revitalise the idea of an international entity able to counter all kinds of crime and corruption in sport and protect athletes and those who interact with sport. This led Play the Game to start the ClearingSport project.

The voices shaping ClearingSport

ClearingSport builds on consultations with over 200 experts, members, and representatives across a broad range of stakeholders:

Academics

Law enforcement agencies and investigators

Journalists and media

Athletes

Judiciary bodies

Relevant activists and NGOs

Sports integrity bodies

Specialised anti-corruption agencies

These groups represented a wide range of expertise on

- ✓ Anti-corruption and integrity frameworks
- ✓ Criminal, tax, and financial laws and their enforcement
- ✓ Ethics and compliance
- ✓ Human rights and athlete welfare
- ✓ International initiatives and collaborations
- ✓ Legal and judicial processes
- ✓ Media and investigative journalism in sport
- ✓ Sport-specific crimes, including match-fixing and doping
- ✓ Sports governance and regulations

These groups were consulted and engaged through various means, such as:



Surveys on global integrity in sport



Discussions on global integrity in sport, involving multiple stakeholders in public and private settings



A dedicated multi-stakeholder advisory group of 20 members (see the list on page 35)



A timeline of events regarding the foundation of ClearingSport [can be found on our website](#).

In June 2022, sports integrity leaders gathered at Play the Game 2022. They encouraged Play the Game to explore the viability of an international agency against all forms of corruption in sport.

Photo: Thomas Søndergaard/Play the Game

In June 2023, almost 200 experts called for establishing an international anti-corruption agency in sport in a survey under Play the Game's ClearingSport project.

enmark



What we have done

In collaboration with this extensive group of experts, the ClearingSport project has conducted various types of research and analyses, including:



Systemic reviews and contextual analyses

- ▷ Systematic literature reviews of sports governance and integrity to synthesise existing research and key debates
- ▷ Event history analysis to construct a timeline of major developments over the last 25 years, including noteworthy scandals and criminal cases, key reforms in sports governance, and best practice examples in sports integrity



Legacy and policy analyses

- ▷ Comparative legal and regulatory analysis to map existing legislative and regulatory frameworks affecting the field of sports integrity
- ▷ Stakeholder and network mapping to assess partnerships, initiatives, and mechanisms established both in and outside of sport to deal with the increasing risks



Assessments

- ▷ of economic impact, to evaluate the costs associated with criminal and corrupt activity in sport
- ▷ of policy effectiveness, to test the efficacy of existing efforts to tackle crime and corruption in sport and identify the remaining gaps for improvement

Our process



**Interested in our analysis?
[Download the full report here](#)**

Join us for the work ahead

This booklet sums up the findings of ClearingSport and proposes practical solutions to counter crime and corruption in sport. We hope it will stimulate and inspire the ongoing debate across stakeholders.

We present the key findings of our research by defining challenges to integrity in sport and identifying potential solutions to each of these challenges. In line with our original call to action, this booklet proposes an all-encompassing, international entity.

Even though we have tried to reach consensus, we recognise that not all stakeholders necessarily agree on every single element.

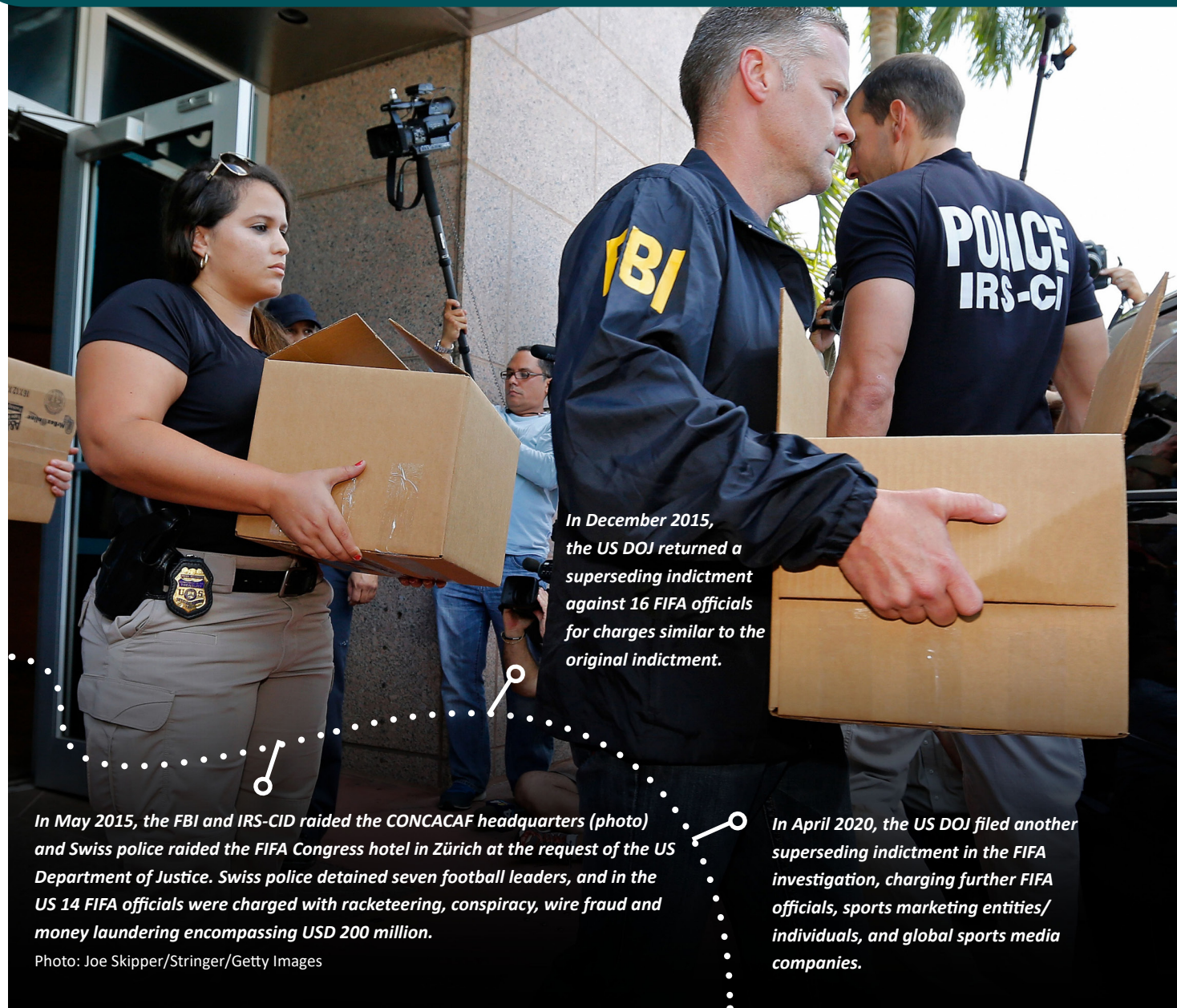
That's where you – the reader – come in.

This booklet encourages you to approach the content with a selective eye. We do not present it as an all-or-nothing exercise. You may embrace certain elements and reject others. However, our research and consultation have convinced us that a comprehensive and coordinated approach will secure the strongest solution. Ultimately, we hope you will help expand on the challenges, refine and debate the solutions, and adapt and adjust our proposal if needed.

The ClearingSport project was financed and coordinated by Play the Game. Now that it is delivered, Play the Game encourages all interested stakeholders to carry on.



The problem: Crime and corruption in sport



In December 2015, the US DOJ returned a superseding indictment against 16 FIFA officials for charges similar to the original indictment.

In May 2015, the FBI and IRS-CI raided the CONCACAF headquarters (photo) and Swiss police raided the FIFA Congress hotel in Zürich at the request of the US Department of Justice. Swiss police detained seven football leaders, and in the US 14 FIFA officials were charged with racketeering, conspiracy, wire fraud and money laundering encompassing USD 200 million.

Photo: Joe Skipper/Stringer/Getty Images

In April 2020, the US DOJ filed another superseding indictment in the FIFA investigation, charging further FIFA officials, sports marketing entities/individuals, and global sports media companies.

The challenges – by the numbers

When sport is exploited for illicit purposes and private gain, there are human and economic costs. Crime and corruption not only weaken trust in sports competitions and those who govern and participate in them; they damage society. Research reveals staggering statistics about the extent of the criminal and corrupt activities related to sport. A few examples:

Competition manipulation ¹

Betting-related match-fixing in European football amounts to **€500 million-€1 billion**

Bribery ²

In the 2010s, sports governing bodies received estimated bribes worth **USD 1.1 billion**

Interpersonal violence ³

Up to **80%** of sports participants reported experiencing psychological, physical, or sexual violence in sport

Money laundering ⁴

USD 140 billion is laundered each year through sports betting



Corruption ⁸

Corruption in **mega-sport event** infrastructure projects has been found at every stage of the project cycle



Illegal betting

82% of the total betting market is illegal (2017) ⁵

61% of online sports betting is not licensed or regulated (2021) ⁶



Between **USD 340 billion and 1.7 trillion** is wagered on illicit betting markets each year ⁷

1 Andreff (2019) // 2 Andreff (2019) // 3 Hartill et al. (2023) // 4 UNODC (2021) // 5 IRIS (2017) // 6 Asian Racing Federation (2021) // 7 UNODC (2021) // 8 Engineers Against Poverty (2021). [Find the complete references in the full report.](#)

ClearingSport's assessment

The ClearingSport project points out two main issues affecting the integrity of sport. First, rapid and unregulated commercialisation has allowed crime and corruption to flourish in sport. Second, existing efforts to counter them leave significant gaps, and weak enforcement makes them less effective.

How sport became vulnerable to crime, corruption, and other breaches of integrity

Sport has increasingly become a target for crime and corruption, both internally and through exploitation by organised criminal networks. Several key factors contribute to this vulnerability:

- **The rapid commercialisation of sport** has created vast financial opportunities, attracting not only legitimate stakeholders but also investors and merchants who prioritise profit over sporting values.
- **Insufficient regulatory frameworks** make sport an attractive sector for illicit activities, particularly in comparison to other industries.
- **Weak governance structures** of sports organisations make them vulnerable due to inadequate oversight, conflicts of interest, and a lack of independent regulation.
- **The transnational nature** of sport and its governance structures hinders the effectiveness of national regulatory, investigative, and judicial frameworks in preventing and combating corruption.
- **Technological developments** such as the expansion of the Internet, the evolution of smartphones, and artificial intelligence constantly facilitate new criminal methods that authorities struggle to adapt to.

In September 2021, Kuwaiti IOC member Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah was sentenced in Switzerland to 14 months in jail for forgery in a political affair in his home country. An appeal led to a two-year suspended jail sentence. Photo: Mark Runnacles/Getty Images

In May 2024, the IOC issued a 15-year ban for Sheikh Al-Sabah after his conviction was upheld, citing his “betrayal of his IOC member’s oath” and “damage to the IOC’s reputation”. This followed more than a decade of his involvement in sports scandals, most lately meddling with OCA elections in favour of his brother.



Existing mechanisms fall short

Over the past 25 years, hundreds of initiatives have been taken to eradicate crime, corruption, and other breaches of integrity in sport. Sports organisations, event organisers, athletes, and officials are bounded by the resulting laws and regulations that have been introduced and tightened at both the national and international levels, along with countless guidelines and codes related to sports integrity.

But too often, these efforts fall short for a variety of reasons. Typically, they are carried out in silos within the diverse issues and ultimately have not produced the cross-cutting collaborative frameworks needed to effectively address the issues they set out to tackle. As a result, significant gaps remain, allowing crime and corruption to persist.



Interested in reading our findings in depth?
Download the full report

FOUR WAYS TO CLOSE THE GAPS

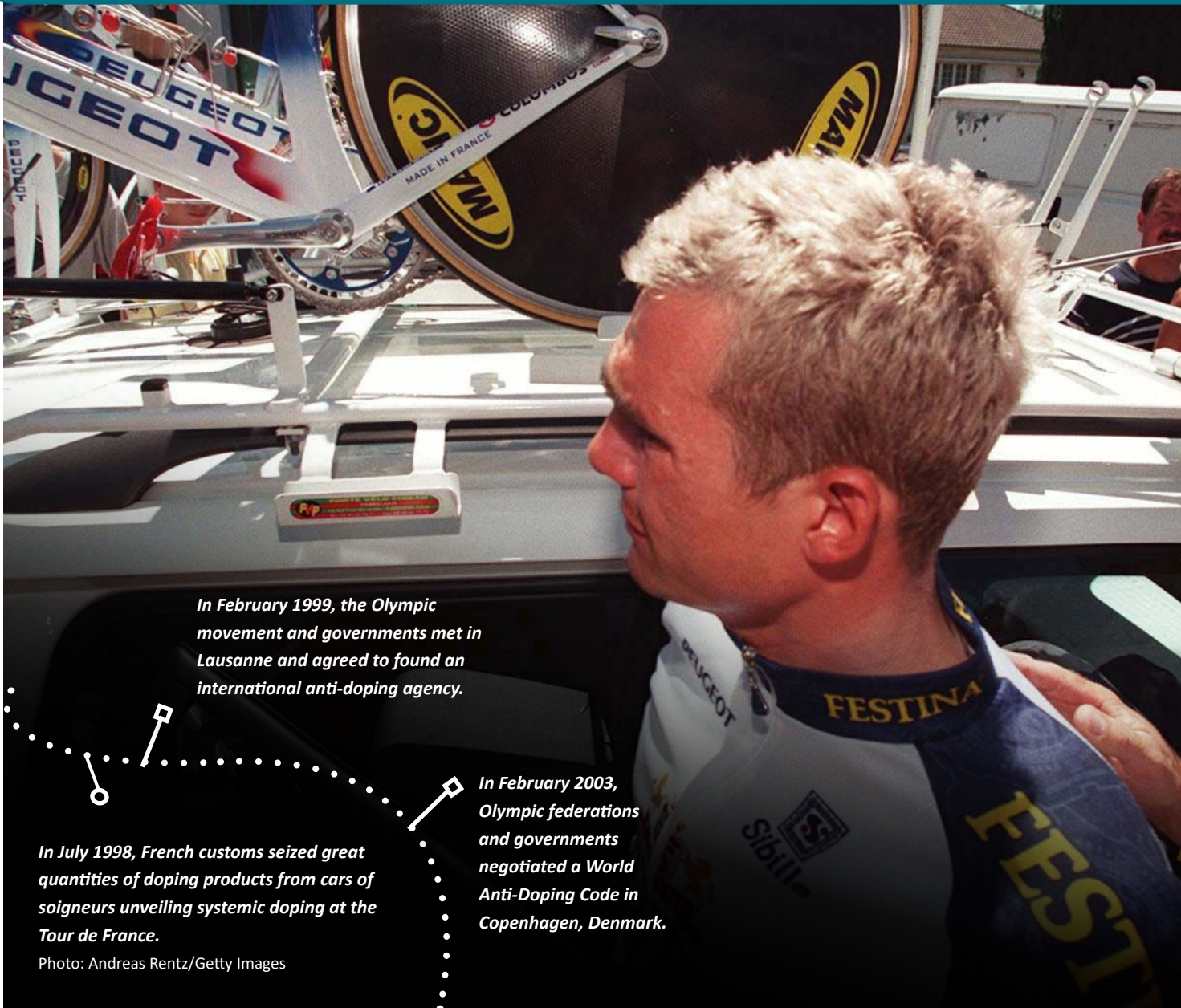
Four solutions have been identified to strengthen and address gaps across existing efforts to counter crime and corruption in sport.

Our research considered where existing efforts are incomplete or are not executed as originally intended, alongside remaining gaps. Our analysis yielded several solutions:

1. Create a collaborative framework to harmonise existing policies into universal minimum standards of integrity in sport.
2. Establish a global regulator to monitor and enforce the defined minimum standards through compliance mechanisms.
3. Support relevant authorities in investigations to protect athletes and those who interact with sport.
4. Introduce alternatives for dispute management in sport, particularly in the areas of arbitration and mediation, to ensure real independence and fair access to justice.

There are many ways these four solutions could be implemented. The next section explores how an international entity with clear separation of powers could bring them together as institutional capacities, unifying efforts to counter crime and corruption in sport.

Our proposal: Towards an entity



In February 1999, the Olympic movement and governments met in Lausanne and agreed to found an international anti-doping agency.

In July 1998, French customs seized great quantities of doping products from cars of soigneurs unveiling systemic doping at the Tour de France.

Photo: Andreas Rentz/Getty Images

In February 2003, Olympic federations and governments negotiated a World Anti-Doping Code in Copenhagen, Denmark.

To more effectively address the issue of crime, corruption, and other integrity breaches in sport, this proposal advocates for an all-encompassing international entity with clear separation of powers across the below-described capacities.

1. Collaborative framework

To harmonise existing policies into universal minimum standards of integrity in sport, an international entity could coordinate existing networks to define and administer a collaborative framework.

2. Global regulator

To monitor and apply the defined minimum standards outlined by the collaborative framework, an international entity could implement compliance mechanisms as a global regulator.

3. Investigations

To strengthen the protection of athletes and those who interact with sport, an international entity could bolster investigations, intelligence gathering, and other necessary steps by managing a reporting mechanism that offers full protection to whistle-blowers and others involved in the investigative process.

4. Dispute management alternatives

To ensure fair access to justice, an international entity could offer specialist services related to sign-posting, arbitration and mediation as dispute management alternatives.

The following sections explore each of these capacities in more depth, outlining what they look like, how they address the defined challenges, and their proposed implementation in an international, all-encompassing entity.



Collaborative framework

The challenges

The challenges in addressing crime and corruption in sport stem from a complex mix of structural, legal, and jurisdictional issues:

- Sport lacks the tools and authority to tackle (trans-) national criminal issues
- Existing international and national laws and sports regulations are not harmonised, leading to a patchwork of different rules and jurisdictions across the full range of integrity topics
- The entities and initiatives addressing breaches of integrity in sport largely operate independently and focus on a single type of violation, such as corruption, financial crime, competition manipulation, doping, or human rights abuses

ClearingSport's assessment

These challenges continue in part because actors are not united by universal minimum standards that comprehensively address crime, corruption, and other breaches of integrity in sport.

Several efforts offer good practice examples of addressing these challenges, and the intergovernmental initiatives and collaborative forums that exist are good starting points.



A timeline of events exemplifying good practice can be found on our website.

But individually, they are unlikely to succeed in enforcing the existing international laws, national laws, and sports regulations they have produced, let alone unify these efforts towards a set of universal minimum standards.

Limited coordination across specialist entities – who perform important work encompassing issues like financial crime, competition manipulation, doping, and human rights abuses – makes it difficult to address the common underlying causes of integrity breaches.

So far, there is no entity leading the charge to unify this patchwork of standards and initiatives by creating comprehensive minimum standards in collaboration with key stakeholders. A collaborative framework could also enable information sharing, which is paramount to achieving the desired goals.



Interested in our full assessment?
[Download the full report here](#)

In December 2014, whistleblowers Yuliya and Vitaly Stepanov (photo) revealed an international doping fraud scheme in a documentary by German broadcaster ARD, involving top officials from IAAF (now: World Athletics) and Russian athletics.

In May 2016, defected head of the Moscow anti-doping lab, Grigory Rodchenkov, told the New York Times about a doping fraud scheme set up by the Russian state during the 2014 Sochi Olympics.

In December 2020, after years of legal dispute, CAS decided to cut WADA's international ban on Russian sport down from four to two years.



The identified solution

Create a collaborative framework to harmonise existing policies into universal minimum standards of integrity in sport.

Based on the assessment of the defined challenges, an identified solution is a collaborative framework. A collaborative framework would:

- unite stakeholders in setting minimum universal standards to apply, at a minimum, across existing frameworks, initiatives, and mechanisms
- provide seamless access to existing frameworks, initiatives, and mechanisms not yet applied to sport and ensure they are fit for purpose in the sporting context
- establish and support existing capacity building via the transfer of knowledge and resources
- disseminate good practice and thought leadership in establishing internal procedures, practices, and bodies
- put mechanisms in place for the sharing of information

In April 2008, managing director of betting giant Betfair, Mark Davies, called for a world integrity agency encompassing both drugs, betting, and any other form of corruption, in New Zealand newspaper the Sunday Star Times.

Photo: South China Morning Post /Getty Images

In July 2006, in the anthology 'Korruption im Sport', German journalist Jens Weinreich proposed to establish a 'World Ethics Commission of Sport'.

Photo: Tine Harden/Play the Game

Towards an entity >>

To harmonise existing policies into universal minimum standards of integrity in sport, an international entity could coordinate existing networks to define and administer a collaborative framework.

To ensure effective coordination and oversight, the entity is proposed to be an umbrella organisation connecting the following initiatives, among others:

- National integrity bodies (NIBs), which are established by the national governments, National Olympic Committees (NOC), or multi-stakeholder groups to address integrity issues.
- International sports integrity units across Olympic and non-Olympic international sports federations that 1) address multiple integrity issues and 2) have operational independence from the governing body and thus exhibit separation of powers and oversight.

The mandate of the umbrella entity can be defined by a charter or a convention led by public authorities. This overarching charter or convention would be able to tie together existing frameworks, initiatives, and mechanisms, make them fit for purpose in the context of sport and underpin them with good governance standards to ensure their effectiveness.

In February 2011, WADA's director general David Howman called for a 'World Sports Integrity Agency' at the EU Sport Forum in Budapest.

Photo: Jens Astrup/Play the Game

In September 2022, member of the European Parliament, Viola von Cramon, presented a report proposing a 'World Anti-Corruption Agency' in sport.

Photo: Thomas Søndergaard/Play the Game

The challenges

For years, sport has largely been allowed to regulate itself. This approach has failed to prevent and counter crime and corruption for several reasons:

- Sport's self-regulation involves an inherent conflict of interests as each sports governing body must both nurture its commercial interests and simultaneously protect the integrity of sport.
- The governance structures in sport by and large lack separation between the commercial, political, investigative, and judicial powers.
- The blurred and permeable boundaries between sport and society complicate jurisdiction over sports-related issues, making it difficult to determine which authority is responsible for and able to enforce regulation

ClearingSport's assessment

There is significant variation in both the willingness and ability to enforce criminal laws and sports regulations when it comes to addressing integrity issues in sport.

The Olympic movement has long recognised that the right to autonomy must be earned through good governance. However, the self-regulation of sport and the accompanying inherent conflicts of interest have led to insufficient and ineffective enforcement.

Despite a recent push for the application of good governance standards across sport, we observe that – in reality – those standards are not consistently enforced.



A timeline of events exemplifying governance reforms [can be found on our website.](#)

Sport's claim for unlimited autonomy has furthermore deterred actors from outside sport from intervening in sport.

Public authorities often avoid challenging sports autonomy for several reasons, including concerns about repercussions from sport or public backlash from sports fans or those who benefit from sport's commercial success. These are some of the reasons why public authorities neither pass sport-specific laws, nor dedicate the necessary resources to oversight, resulting in minimal enforcement of globally accepted standards in the sports industry.

ClearingSport does not aim to remove the autonomy of sport. On the contrary, we aim to protect its autonomy from those sorts of abuse that undermine the legitimacy of sports governing bodies and their fundamental right to freedom of association.



At the EU Sport Forum in Budapest in February 2011, honorary IOC member and president of the International Weightlifting Federation, Tamás Aján, warned that "corruption is everywhere in sport".

In May 2013, journalist Grit Hartmann exposed wide-spread corruption under IWF president Tamás Ajan, who was nevertheless reelected.

Photo: LatinContent/Getty Images

Following revelations by Grit Hartmann and German ARD TV about doping fraud and corruption at the IWF, confirmed and extended in an investigation by Richard H. McLaren, president Tamás Aján stepped down in April 2020 after 44 years in top positions.

The identified solution

Establish a global regulator to monitor and enforce standards through compliance and sanctioning mechanisms.

ClearingSport finds that a new entity with clear separation of powers should also play the role of a global regulator. In cases where the agreed universal integrity standards, sport’s own regulations, or national and international laws are violated, the global regulator is mandated to ensure compliance or refer the case to relevant judicial authorities.

Some mechanisms for the entity to ensure compliance could be:

- rewards for compliance, such as verification, audits, assurance of adherence, certificates of compliance, etc.
- measures that impose costs in cases of non-compliance, such as financial repercussions, exclusion from other benefits, reputational damage, publicly announcing investigative results etc.
- resources to implement standards, such as capacity building, for relevant stakeholders, including those subject to the regulations within the global regulator’s jurisdiction

In February 2025, Luis Rubiales was convicted of sexual assault by a Spanish court.

During the 2023 FIFA Women’s World Cup medal presentation ceremony in August 2023, Spanish FA president Luis Rubiales sexually assaulted midfielder Jenni Hermoso.
Photo: Maja Hitij/FIFA/Getty Images



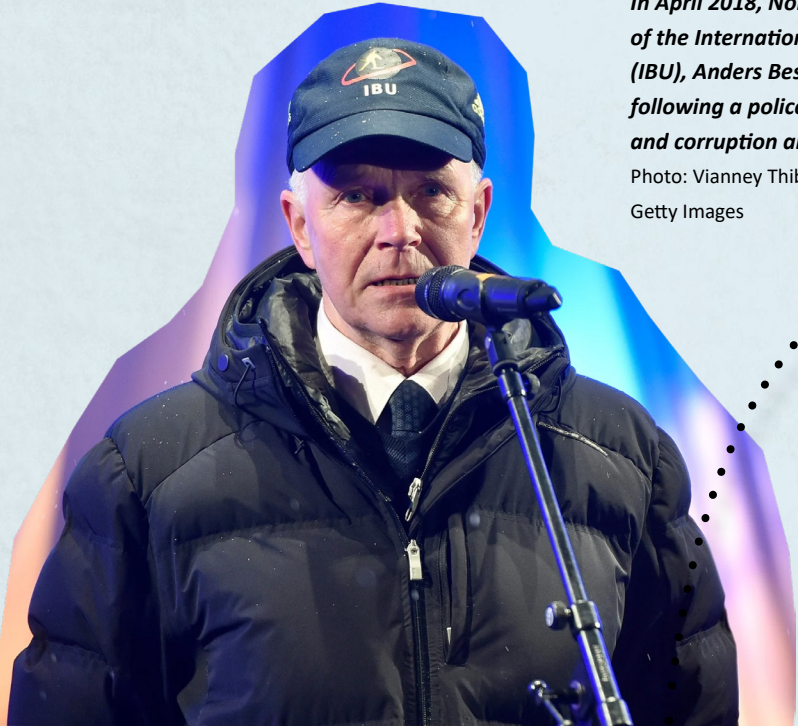
Towards an entity >>

To monitor and apply the defined minimum standards outlined by the collaborative framework, an international entity could implement compliance and sanctioning mechanisms.

The entity would support existing initiatives that ensure compliance with standards in their respective jurisdictions, including national integrity bodies (NIBs) and international sports integrity units.

The entity would also establish its own jurisdiction for cases that cannot be clearly referred to a responsible authority by creating a code based on international good practice and legal frameworks of standards.

In April 2018, Norwegian president of the International Biathlon Union (IBU), Anders Besseberg, stepped down following a police raid of headquarters and corruption allegations.
Photo: Vianney Thibaut/Agence Zoom/Getty Images



In April 2024, former IBU president Anders Besseberg received a three year prison sentence in Norway for aggravated corruption. Besseberg has appealed the sentence.

The challenges

The self-regulation of sport has also led to challenges related to sport policing itself.

- As evidenced by several cases of crime and corruption in sport, sport has a proven lack of will and ability to investigate itself and ensure investigations are rigorously pursued.
- Too often, whistleblowers are inadequately protected and face serious repercussions, including but not limited to reputational damage and threats to their personal security.
- Existing law enforcement agencies have limited bandwidth to monitor compliance with international legal standards and to translate the overlap between those standards and national legal systems.
- Investigations across the variety of sports entities, law enforcement agencies, and other actors are not shared, making it difficult to understand the extent and nature of the issues.



A timeline of scandals in sport [can be found on our website.](#)

ClearingSport's assessment

The current landscape of sports crime, corruption, and integrity breaches persists, at times enabled by the fragmented approach to accountability that exists both within and outside of sport.

Within sport, there are both systemic and individual obstacles to objective investigation processes. Most sports integrity units under international sports federations are not sufficiently independent from their governing bodies, marked by conflicts of interest and lacking the ability to conduct impartial investigations. Cultural and political dynamics also create barriers to accountability. Leading sports officials who attempt to challenge the status quo or confront corrupt practices risk retribution, including the loss of voter support and/or risking their jobs.

Outside of sport, authorities are unable or reluctant to investigate the opaque and complex world of sport. International agencies and networks that investigate, prosecute, and share data on crime and misconduct in sport have primarily focused on specific themes rather than being united under a guiding entity with a comprehensive strategy.

Lastly, the legal status of the majority of international sports federations (IFs) as 'non-profit' entities in Switzerland, where they are predominantly based, has lent them a certain degree of autonomy and made public authorities reluctant to investigate their affairs.

In November 2011, BBC Panorama and Andrew Jennings disclosed a list of payments from ISL to sports leaders, naming three FIFA officials.

In August 2011, investigative journalist Andrew Jennings (photo) exposes offshore bank accounts and alleged corrupt dealings of top FIFA leaders Jack Warner and Chuck Blazer.

In a Swiss court in March 2008, former directors of sports marketing giant ISL confirmed paying bribes worth around USD 100 million to FIFA and other sports officials. These bribes were not illegal at the time of the events.

Photo: Thomas Søndergaard/Play the Game

The identified solution

Support relevant authorities in investigations to protect athletes and those who interact with sport.

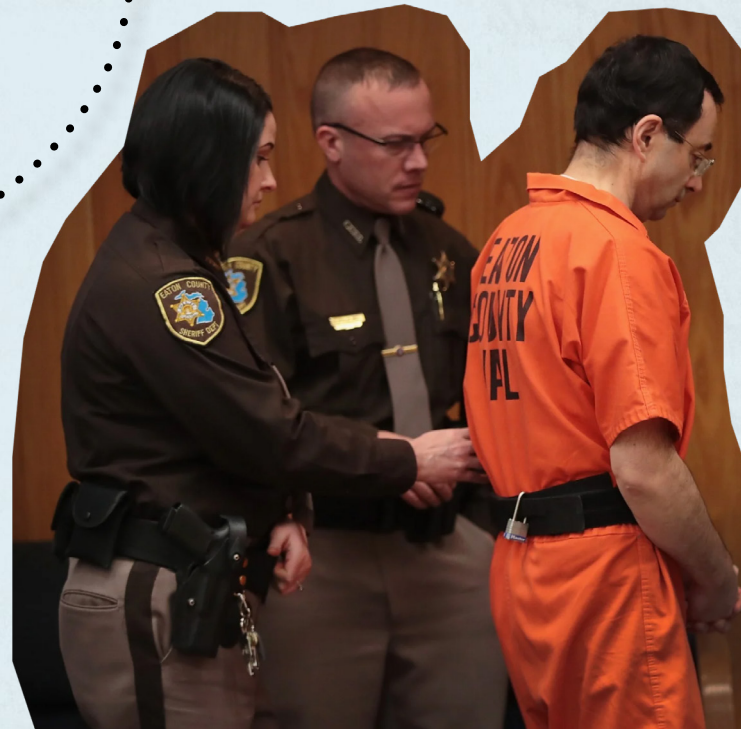
A global entity as described should carry out and support investigations. To ensure crime and corruption are investigated properly, investigations should:

- facilitate information gathering, exchange, and collaboration at different levels and across jurisdictions between law enforcement, prosecutorial networks, betting operators and regulators, data companies, etc.
- investigate corruption and integrity complaints and concerns by providing education and specialist fact-finding services, supplementary to and not precluding coordination with regional and national authorities and sports investigations
- implement a triage process to assess cases for next steps and involvement of relevant stakeholders
- lead capacity building with relevant stakeholders, including law enforcement and judiciary bodies

In January 2018, Larry Nassar, former team doctor of US gymnastics and employee at Michigan State University, was sentenced to 175 years in prison for sexual abuse of athletes.

Photo: Scott Olson/Getty Images

In September 2016, a number of gymnasts accused team doctor of US Gymnastics, Larry Nassar, of sexual abuse.



Towards an entity >>>

To strengthen the protection of athletes and those who interact with sport, an international entity could bolster investigations, intelligence gathering, and other necessary steps by managing a reporting mechanism that offers full protection to whistleblowers and others involved in the investigative process.

At present, no centralised entity is responsible for policing and investigating crime, corruption, and other integrity breaches in sport. An entity would implement investigative mechanisms to

- support public authorities in ensuring sport and their stakeholders are compliant with international legal standards
- create partnerships and open dialogue with national anti-corruption and financial crime units

Mechanisms

Reporting mechanism with whistleblower protection

A new online complaints mechanism, such as an 'Integrity in sport helpline' or support of existing helplines, would require these minimum features:

- Whistleblower protection through implementing international standards for whistleblowing management systems (i.e., ISO 37002, EU Directive 2019/1937, OECD 2021 Recommendation)
- Multiple access points
- Conducting pre-investigation on proffered information
- Facilitating contact between the whistleblower and relevant law enforcement authorities with jurisdiction
- Signposting to remedy

Sports integrity commissioner/ombudsperson

A commissioner/ombudsperson would provide a signposting function and provide independent oversight into the handling of sports corruption and integrity issues ensuring greater transparency and accountability within sport. The individual may issue public reports.

Signposting to networks and avenues for remedy

Remedy is important for athletes, and avenues for effective remedy need to be signposted. However, oftentimes, there are no sufficient remedy mechanisms. To ensure access to justice and remedy, a strategy could include creating a global network of legal experts who may provide relevant free legal aid. It may also include directing to resources for the funding of legal support in proceedings.

Specialist services

Specialist services could alternatively or concurrently be offered, depending on the nature of the investigation and the organisation requiring the service. Services to be considered include background checks and vetting services, independent assessments of compliance, financial investigative methods and techniques, review of annual financial audits, and investigation case file reporting.

Dispute management alternatives

The challenges

The current system of arbitration in sport was not a specific subject of research in the ClearingSport project. However, the matter came up regularly, and previous research reveals several issues that affect the legal due process of especially athletes, but also other actors.

- Review of the decisions of sport bodies and its dispute settle is administered within each sport, providing little to no separation of powers.
- The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) is the overwhelmingly dominant body in sports arbitration. This body lacks sufficient independence and transparency, including in its procedural rules, the selection of arbitrators, and the reasoning and publication of the awards.
- Costs to access justice are prohibitive for individual complainants, including athletes in particular in the areas where highly technical expertise is needed in combination with strict liability.

ClearingSport's assessment

The current system of arbitration in sport conflicts with two principles of access to fair justice:

1. The system is mandatory, rather than voluntary
2. The system does not respect the rule of law, as demonstrated by ineffective independence and lack of adherence to due process

Alternative avenues for dispute management that would ensure that sports arbitration complies with due process and broadly the rule of law are a necessary complement of any good governance and integrity reforms.

In November 2020, Haitian Football Federation president Yves-Jean Bart was banned for life by FIFA after allegations of sexual abuse and harassment of young female players.

Photo: Alexandre Schneider/Getty Images



In February 2023, CAS upheld Yves Jean-Bart's appeal against the decision of the FIFA Ethics Committee.

The identified solution

Introduce alternatives for dispute management in sport, particularly in the areas of arbitration and mediation, to ensure fair access to justice.

Arbitration

Partner organisations should be able to outsource arbitration to specialist services in place of a sports disciplinary or appeals panel being conducted by the sport.

Mediation

Mediation can be particularly useful in the provision of remedy when there are very clear means to redress the power imbalance between parties. Mediation is often a swift and cost-effective way of bringing the parties to an agreed solution. Mediation services to be considered include:

- selection and appointment of a specially trained neutral facilitator with a good understanding of the sport
- organisation of the mediation in a confidential setting using a mediation procedure
- mediation of the dispute and assistance to finalise a settlement agreement between the parties

At the Beijing Winter Olympics in February 2022, 15-year-old Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva came under immense pressure as Olympic authorities disagreed on how to handle the revelation of her positive doping test.

Photo: DeFodi Images/Getty Images

Towards an entity >>

To ensure fair access to justice, an international entity could offer specialist services related to arbitration and mediation as dispute management alternatives. Separately, this could be complemented with a reform of CAS.

In January 2024, CAS issued Kamila Valieva a four-year period of ineligibility, treating her case no differently from an adult athlete.



FAQ: A concept for an entity



In September 2017, coaches, sports agents, advisors, and a major shoe company executive were indicted for various fraud and corruption schemes related to college basketball in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).


Photo: Kevin Hagen/Getty Images


This booklet has defined the challenges facing sport today and has identified relevant solutions to those challenges. In line with the call from experts in 2022, this proposal implements the four identified solutions through an international, all-encompassing entity with these same four capacities.


Although we believe that an all-encompassing entity will be the most effective solution, we also appreciate if any part of this proposal is translated into progress in reducing breaches of integrity in sport. With that in mind, we have thought through potential FAQs, but nonetheless – intentionally – left these discussion points open, to be refined with stakeholders.


Who should fund these efforts?


Any entity that benefits from sport has a duty to protect it. This responsibility includes investing in integrity-related efforts.

 **Sports** can fund efforts through membership fees, charging a fee for services otherwise offered by the private sector (such as specialised education, and/or training in good governance, crime prevention, and other integrity-related topics) or dedicating a portion of profits from sponsorship, broadcasting, or athlete transfer deals, particularly those with risks related to crime and corruption.

 **Sports sponsors and broadcasters** can also independently set aside a percentage of all their sports contracts for integrity purposes.

 **Government authorities** can contribute public funds to these efforts as an investment in the taxes that can be collected from regulating illegal markets and preventing and rectifying tax evasion and/or fraud.

 **Law enforcement agencies** can reinvest seized assets as a preventive strategy against crime and corruption.

 **Betting operators** can dedicate a portion of profits to ensure the legal betting industry is a responsible and proactive advocate of regulated activity.

How would an entity be governed?

Any entity would first need to be governed by defining principles including:

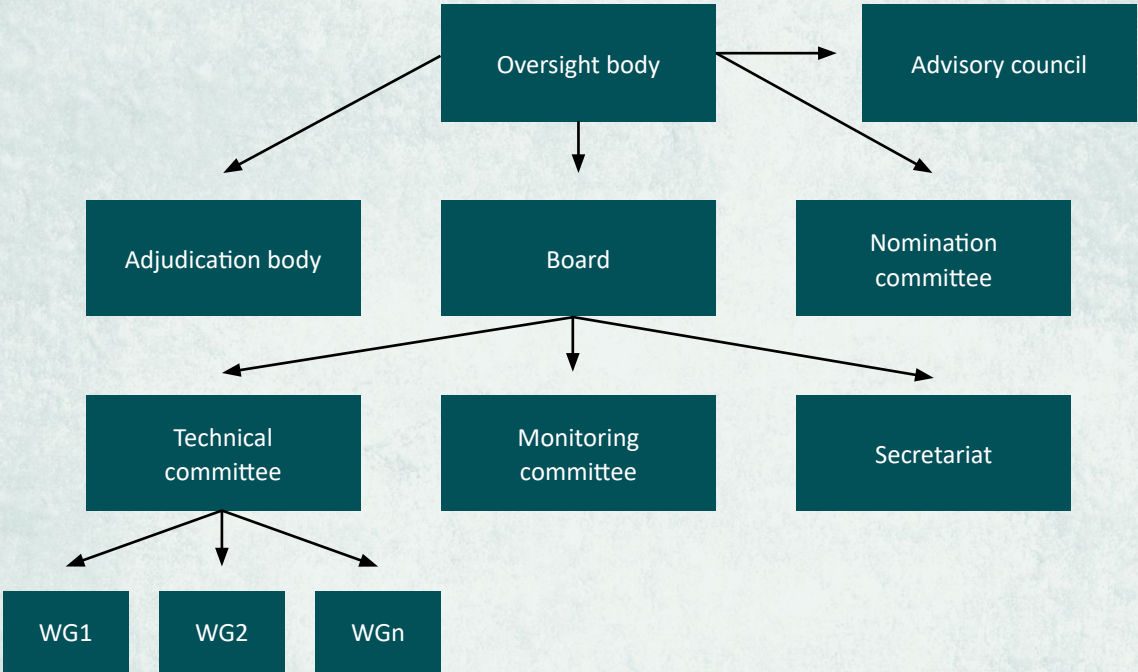
- operational independence
- transparency
- accountability
- responsibility
- equity
- stringency
- democracy
- clear separation of powers

 **For comprehensive details on these discussion points, download the full report here**

How could an entity be structured?

We drew inspiration from organisations with similar functions, such as the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB), and the International Labour Organization (ILO), to outline a potential governance structure.

A chart of the entity could look like this:



 **For a more detailed description, please [download the full report](#)**

How could sport be involved?

The entity should be established in accordance with the key principle of independence. Two broad scenarios can be envisioned regarding the representation of sports governing bodies in the agency’s governance.

Scenario 1: Sport in a consultative capacity

In the first scenario, sports governing bodies serve a purely consultative role. They are represented in the advisory council but excluded from the agency’s decision-making bodies. The oversight body consists solely of member state delegates, appointed for their governance expertise. While sports governing body representatives may be invited to working groups (WG1, WG2, WGN...), the majority of members should remain independent of the sports movement.

Scenario 2: Sport as decision-maker

In the second scenario, sports governing bodies would participate in key decision-making bodies alongside other sports movement stakeholders, such as athletes. To ensure balanced and inclusive representation, the agency’s oversight body could adopt a tripartite-plus model, inspired by the International Labour Organization (ILO). The general assembly could consist of four distinct groups, exemplified in this table:

Group	Representation %	Appointment method
Government group	50%	Appointed by national governments
Sports movement	25%	Elected by sports governing bodies
Athletes	15%	Elected by athlete unions
Independent and civil society	10%	Selected through an independent process

Epilogue

International sports organisations were established more than 100 years ago to ensure that every athlete on the planet played by the same rules. This centralised power gave sport a unique basis to bring its officials and other stakeholders under a common playbook.

Since then, sport and its role in society have evolved dramatically. However, the governance of sport remains much the same, leading to an ever-growing list of scandals that sport cannot – and should not – solve on its own.

Since 1997, Play the Game has been a leader among a large and growing group of stakeholders who are passionate about sport and share the belief that more can be and should be done to protect sport against crime, corruption, and breaches of integrity.

This passion has also driven the group effort creating ClearingSport.

However, to make our proposals a reality, other stakeholders need to engage in lobbying, funding, and defining and refining the structures that can implement the identified solutions. This includes governments, the sports movement, existing networks, sponsors, rights holders, the media, athletes’ associations, fan groups, and more.

Play the Game has delivered on the promise we made at our 2022 conference. Now, we pass the baton.

Credits

This booklet is a document based on consensus, and the individual advisors cannot be held accountable for each detail in the proposal.

Advisory group

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A few advisory group members have chosen to stay anonymous.

Special thanks to

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In February 2024, the ClearingSport project was debated by dozens of key stakeholders during Play the Game 2024 in Trondheim.

Photo: Thomas Søndergaard/Play the Game



