Cleaning up corruption in Kenyan football has turned out to be a much larger project than expected. But after seven years’ hard work, Bob Munro, the Canadian-born chairman of top club Mathare United, can begin to see progress.

“I expected it would only take 1-2 years to clean up the sport. I was wrong. There were many, many times over the past seven years when I wanted to give up. But that was no longer a personal choice as I have never broken a promise to the Mathare youth. Some predators in the Kenyan Football Federation were stealing the future of the youth of the Mathare slums and I had promised to help them,” Munro told participants on the opening day of Play the Game 2007.

A false dawn
For a while the strategy of an alternative football league seemed to be working and in early 2006 FIFA convened a meeting in Cairo in Egypt. Here FIFA, the African Football Confederation (CAF), the Kenyan Sports Minister, the Kenyan Football Federation and three representatives from the

“The conference carried the ambitious subtitle “Creating coalitions for good governance in sport”, and engineer Bob Munro is a veteran of such coalitions. In 2003, he was instrumental in setting up an alternative football league in Kenya for eleven Premier League clubs who shared a wish to play corruption-free football, and he holds important posts such as Vice Chairman of the Kenyan Premier League Ltd. and Chairman of the football club Mathare United FC that is part of the Mathare Youth Sports Association.

After years of turmoil, a new league has been formed based on values such as democracy, transparency and equality

by Kirsten Sparre

HARD LESSONS from fight against football corruption in Kenya

“It is extremely important for sports governing bodies such as UEFA to come to these sorts of events, listen to what all of the people have got to say and try and absorb it and take it on board, because if we are going to be a credible, transparent governing body, we need to listen to these external views.”

Jonathan Hill, Head of UEFA’s Brussels Office.
Despite the threats of being deported from the country, chairman of Mathare United football club, Bob Munro, has worked for many years to create a corruption-free football league in Kenya.

new Kenyan Premier League Ltd. signed the so-called Cairo Agreement to normalise the situation for football in Kenya.

“Sadly, that historic break-through meeting soon turned out to be a false dawn and again the turning point was money,” Munro told the conference.

On the back of the Cairo agreements, the Kenyan Premier League Ltd., attracted sponsorship money worth more than 100 million Kenyan shillings. Officials from the Kenyan Football Federation then changed their minds about the Cairo Agreement and said that the sponsorship money really belonged to them and not to the clubs. That led to a drawn out battle with the government and KFF officials on one side and the Kenyan Premier League with CAF and FIFA on the other side, and it culminated in Kenya being suspended from FIFA.

**Threat of deportation**

The politics of football in Kenya are baffling for most outsiders, and in late 2006 events took a turn for the bizarre. The Kenyan Sports Minister decided to dissolve the Kenyan Football Federation although he had no authority to do so, and he set up a Munro Probe Committee to investigate Bob Munro and his conduct. Munro was also threatened with deportation from the country.

“The deportation threat was real. In late November 2006 several immigration officers with plain-clothes policemen suddenly appeared at my office and insisted I accompany them downtown to see the Principal Immigration Officer,” Munro told the conference.

Immigration officers said Munro had been given a wrong category of immigration permit and should hand it back and apply for a new permit in a different category. But Munro was certain that if he complied, his application would be rejected and he would be deported.

“I was saved by the fact that I had actually done nothing wrong and by the interventions of friends in and outside government especially the Canadian High Commissioner but also the international petition started by the Play the Game network,” Munro explained.

**The unsung heroes**

The work on combating corruption in Kenyan football continues and 2007 brought good news too. With support from FIFA, CAF and the legitimate Kenyan Football Federation, all legitimately qualified clubs were re-united in a single league under the ownership and management of the Kenyan Premier League Ltd. It is a company in which all clubs have equal shares and votes. FIFA also lifted the international ban on Kenya.

There are many unsung heroes in the struggle for corruption-free football in Kenya, and Munro paid tribute to a number of them. They include club officials, coaches, players and referees who invest their time and energy in cleaning up sport and building good clubs. They also include journalists who refuse bribes and resist threats to expose the culture of corruption, and international aid agencies, Transparency International and the Strømme Foundation in Norway who have filled financial gaps left by corruption.

“But the real reasons for fighting corruption are not monetary. They are not just stealing money, they are stealing the future of our sport. Particularly they are stealing the future of our youth and especially the poorest youth, who dream that through sport they can help themselves and their families escape poverty. Stealing the dreams of the youth is the worst crime committed by the corrupt. That is why you and I and everyone else must never ever relent in the fight for corruption-free sport,” Munro concluded in answer to his own question: why fight corruption in Kenyan football?

**Lessons learned**

Bob Munro has learned the hard way that in fighting corruption in sport

- corruption is never sporting, it always fights back and usually behind your back
- corruption has no regulation time, injury time starts at the first whistle
- corruption has no offside rule, there are always opponents between you and the goal
- honesty pays, but beware if you are asked to pay for honesty
- never underestimate the capacity of the villains to use even tougher tactics against you
- never be tempted or provoked to adopt the dirty tactics used against you
- watch out when the villains stress the need for more “give and take”, they want you to give whilst they continue taking
- expect attacks on your motives and character
- insist on “zero tolerance” and don’t be tempted by appeals to compromise
- be like Liverpool fans and make sure “You will never walk alone”, especially after dark
- always double or triple the time you think or are told it will take

**Clubs help heal Kenya’s wounds**

In February 2008, the Kenyan Premier League Ltd. (KPL) adopted a new motto to guide all their future activities on and off the field. The motto is: “For the good of our sport and our nation.”

Living up to the motto, the KPL decided to begin this year’s season with a special series of “Football for Unity” friendly matches with the aim of bringing people together again in a peaceful way after the violence that swept the country in the wake of the disputed presidential elections in December.

The clubs set a low ticket price and agreed that all gate receipts and referees’ fees would be pooled and the funds donated to the Kenyan Red Cross to help the victims of post-election violence.

The power of football to create unity may also be furthered by the fact that KPL has entered into a four-year sponsorship deal with Africa’s leading satellite tv-station, SuperSport. This means that for the first time in history, KPL matches will be beamed across Africa.

“Being participant of Play the Game conference was an unforgettable experience. It was the most informative, academic and professional experience I ever participated in”.

Fikir Yilkal, Journalist, Ethiopia.