

FIFPro Black Book on Match Fixing : Training the players is not enough.

By Wil van Megen

On 7 February FIFPro published its Black Book Eastern Europe. The survey FIFPro undertook learns that professional football in Eastern Europe is struggling with a terrifying lack of respect for the rights of players. That is the main conclusion from the study performed by the worldwide trade union for professional footballers. The Black Book Eastern Europe gives confirmation that there is an urgent need to improve the legal position of professional players in this region.

FIFA, the worldwide football association, is for many years advocating the 'Respect of Contract'. The study by FIFPro's Task Force underlines that it is mainly the professional footballer who honours his commitments. The professional footballer must fight for his rights, because a large number of the employers are not so particular about their obligations.

The most essential condition for professional football is that a football player is remunerated by his club. But of the 3,357 professional footballers who cooperated in this study, 41.4% do not have their salaries paid on time. We are talking here about a core value of professional football, for if a professional player does not receive a salary he is simply an amateur.

The vast majority of the players who participated in this study earn an average income and are not financially independent. The non-payment of players' salaries has enormous consequences because it aggravates other problems in football. The FIFPro study proves that there is a clear link between non-payment and match fixing. The longer a salary is in arrears, the greater the risk that the player will respond to requests to participate in manipulating matches.

Match fixing is a problem that has been cropping up more and more in recent years. It is a known fact that organized crime is increasingly operating in the world of sport. A player who has to wait for his money has a greater chance of being approached to manipulate a match. What's more, he is vulnerable. 11.9% of all the players that participated in the survey admitted to having been approached to manipulate a match. The study shows that the number of players increases the longer the non-payment of salaries continues. No less than 55% of the players who were approached for match fixing did not have their salaries paid on time.

What we see here is that the circumstances leading to vulnerability of players are caused by other stakeholders in football.

For FIFPro, the current situation in Eastern Europe is unacceptable. That should also be the case for every other stakeholder in football. If they are still not convinced, then FIFPro's Black Book Eastern Europe should set off the alarm bells. With this Black Book in hand, FIFPro calls on all the other parties in the world of football, to join together to combat the shameful abuse in Eastern Europe. FIFPro cannot solve all the problems alone, nor can the other stakeholders. FIFPro believes and hopes that, with the help of national federations, UEFA, FIFA, the European Commission, the ECA and the EPFL, it can address a large number of these problems and at least reduce them.

The Black Book Eastern Europe unfortunately illustrates that the current licensing system of UEFA is proving insufficient. It is much too limited to have any effect. First, this system only applies to clubs who take part in international European competitions. Secondly, it emerges that clubs, who are accountable under this licensing system, are also involved in the practices mentioned above. It seems that the financial fair play program needs extension and a better enforcement mechanism in order to be effective.

The sanction system for match fixing needs to be revised. The current UEFA legislation is so rigid that a player can be punished without being guilty of manipulating. If a player does not report that he is approached for match fixing this can be sufficient for a two year suspension in a career that lasts ten years on average. There is not such a rigid system for coaches, club officials and board members. The football authorities tend to close their eyes for the involvement of others than the players.

In the stories FIFPro heard it became apparent that on several occasions former players were involved in match fixing. The financial situation of ex-professionals after their career is sometimes problematic. This makes this group vulnerable. Ex-players have a lot of credit with their successors. They can easily abuse the trust of these young players. Also this aspect needs to be studied in the near future.

Despite the results, FIFPro will try to remain positive. After all, a majority of professional players in Eastern Europe receive their salary on time, have no problems with violence, and are not illegally put under pressure by clubs to end their contract, to extend it, or to amend it. FIFPro is of the opinion that decent treatment should apply to all professional footballers and will reduce the risk of involvement in match fixing.

In detail some measures to be taken in order to reduce the risks of match fixing are: the relation between player and club must be in writing in a single contract covering the full relationship;

every contract between a professional player must have the status of a labour contract;

all remunerations must be registered in the contract including bonuses etcetera.;

The clubs' budgets must be strictly audited using an improved licensing system, since virtually all those players, who do not receive their salaries, said that their club was in financial

difficulties;

The existing legislation and regulations need to be improved in order to guarantee that a player is safeguarded against the problems regarding his remuneration. At the same time the enforcement system requires full attention;

Establishing guarantee funds for footballers' salaries in case of insolvency of clubs;

A proportional sanction system that does not focus on players alone but involves all possible participants in the process of match fixing is needed.

Next to these measures a rehabilitation system is required especially for those who have been participating in a match fixing process. Speaking up now, under the current system only leads to severe sanctions and does not encourage cooperation to fight match fixing.

The FIFA initiative to involve Interpol in order to fight match fixing is a good step forward. It is quite logic that part of the funds provided will be used for training players even at a very young age. Looking at the outcome of the FIFPro Black Book Eastern Europe training alone will not solve or reduce the problem of match fixing. A broader approach involving all stakeholders is absolutely necessary to achieve substantial results.