



INTERPOL

INTEGRITY IN SPORT

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Photos International Olympic Committee

INVESTIGATIONS

Belgium

Belgium football ripped apart as prosecutors name 57 in 'Clean Hands' probe

January 17 – Brugge strongmen Bart Verhaeghe and Vincent Mannaert, AA Gent's Michel Louwagie, Standard's Bruno Venanzi, Charleroi's Mehdi Bayat and FIFA's Steven Martens were named among the 57 suspects that the federal prosecutor wants in court in operation 'Clean Hands', the largest investigation into match-fixing and corruption in the history of Belgian football.

On Friday, Belgian media revealed that 'Clean Hands' has reached a new stage, with court summons issued for 57 top administrators, referees and coaches.

They include active administrators at six top-flight clubs. The charges include fraud, forgery and taking part in a criminal investigation. The prosecutor's office didn't offer any comment.

In October 2018, Belgian authorities raided 44 Belgian clubs and residences across the country in an investigation into match-fixing and corruption while a further 13 searches took place in France, Luxembourg, Cyprus, Montenegro, Serbia and Macedonia. Dejan Veljkovic, a suspect and an agent with a dubious reputation, is collaborating with the prosecutor.

The Serbian implicated heavyweight names with series of explosive accusations including: George Leekens selected Derrick Tshimanga for the Belgium national team as a tit for tat with Lokeren chairman Roger Lambrecht; Former Anderlecht manager Herman Van Holsbeek liked cash and Rolex watches; Coach Peter Maes hid black money in bread bags; The Belgian FA (KBVB) paid their goalkeeping coach in part via a Cypriot company.

Veljkovic's testimonies allowed the prosecutor to expand the investigation, but in a deal with the judicial authorities, he will be given immunity from prosecution.

Other high profile figures implicated include Mogi Bayat, an influential agent, who will be prosecuted for forgery. The prosecutions also reach into the pool of match officials with referees Sebastien Delferière and Bart Vertenten also been named among the 57.

"Club Brugge has today taken note of the reports regarding the claims in the investigation 'Clean Hands'," wrote Club Brugge in a statement. "The legal advisers appointed by the club will take note of this and take the necessary steps."

OH Leuven said: "OH Leuven takes note of the new media reports in which the club is mentioned. The alleged facts date from before the takeover of the club by King Power. OH Leuven awaits the further course of the legal proceedings and expresses its confidence in the functioning of the court."

The prosecutor also wants to charge current national team goalkeeping coach Erwin Lemmens as well as former KBVB chairman François De Keersmaecker and former KBVB CEO Steven Martens.

"This is not a surprise, but our hearts as football fans bleed," said the CEO of the KBVB Peter Bossaert. "We will first take the time to analyze the case, but we want to emphasize that we will take our responsibilities."

Dozens of coaches and players however have escaped prosecution, but remain under investigation by tax authorities.

Source: 17 January 2022, Inside World Football

Football

<https://www.insideworldfootball.com/2022/01/17/belgium-football-ripped-apart-prosecutors-name-57-clean-hands-probe/>

Belgium

Herman Van Holsbeek placed under arrest warrant in connection with Henrotay case

Charged last week as part of Operation Clean Hands, Herman Van Holsbeek has now been placed under an arrest warrant, this time in the case linked to agent Christophe Henrotay.

The GARDEN tells us this Wednesday that Herman Van Holsbeek (67 years old), former general manager of RSC Anderlecht, was placed under arrest warrant in the context of the Christophe Henrotay case, for private corruption, tax evasion, money laundering and criminal association. He was arrested on Tuesday and will appear next Monday before the Council Chamber. In 2019, Van Holsbeek was already charged with forgery and money laundering but released on conditions.

Last Friday, Herman Van Holsbeek was one of 56 people linked to the Belgian football community and charged as part of Operation Clean Hands.

Source: 20 January 2022, New in 24

Football

<https://new.in-24.com/sport/News/397258.html>

United Kingdom

FA investigate suspicious betting pattern linked to Arsenal yellow card

The Football Association (FA) is examining a yellow card received by an Arsenal player linked to suspicious betting patterns during a Premier League match this season.

Sources have told ESPN that bookmakers have alerted the FA to unusual amounts of money being staked on a member of Mikel Arteta's team to be booked.

An FA spokesperson said: "The FA is aware of the matter in question and is looking into it."

Arsenal are understood to be aware of the situation. The player has not yet been named publicly and a formal investigation has not yet been opened.

It is understood that the FA's enquiries are initially focusing on betting patterns rather than any individual player's conduct.

The growth in the volume of gambling markets has led to what is known as "spot betting" where the possibility of highly specific incidents including the time of a card, corner or throw-in can be wagered on.

Instances of spot-fixing in Premier League football are thought to have been extremely rare, not least because of the huge wages players earn.

However, the UK government has been examining the relationship between the sport and the betting sector, with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport expected to publish a white paper on a wide-ranging review of gambling laws early this year.

Source: 19 January 2022, ESPN

Football

<https://www.espn.com/soccer/arsenal-engarsenal/story/4573357/fa-investigate-suspicious-betting-pattern-linked-to-arsenal-yellow-card>



United Kingdom

Morton boss Dougie Imrie one of 14 charged by SFA over alleged betting offences

Morton manager Dougie Imrie is among 14 people to be charged with alleged historic betting offences by the Scottish FA.

Imrie is accused of gambling on football during his time as a player, dating from 2011 to 2019.

Others cited include Cove Rangers coach Gordon Young and experienced Arbroath midfielder Gavin Swankie.

The SFA has a blanket ban on footballers, coaches and staff betting on any matches.

Inverness Caley Thistle striker Shane Sutherland is listed, along with six current Elgin City players in Aiden Sopel, Conor O'Keefe, Darryl McHardy, Matthew Cooper, Thomas McHale and Rabin Omar.

All 14 have been issued with notices of complaint from the governing body's compliance officer and face hearings on 11 and 18 February.

BBC Scotland understands there are no suspicions of match fixing within the charges and the 14 cases, which were published at once on Friday, are not part of a coordinated investigation.

A Morton statement reads: "Greenock Morton can confirm that it has received a notice of complaint from the Scottish FA Compliance Officer relating to alleged historic breaches of its gambling rules by our first team manager, Dougie Imrie.

"The notice relates to incidents between 2011 and 2019 while Dougie was a player.

"The club and Dougie have cooperated fully with the SFA throughout the investigation and will continue to do so. Dougie will be providing written submissions in response to the notice in the coming days.

"Dougie will have the full backing and support of the Greenock Morton board during this process."

An Elgin City statement added: "We will speak to our players, our lawyers and the SFA in order to determine the most appropriate way to proceed, and if necessary we will issue a further statement in due course."

The Scottish FA declined to comment on a live case when approached by BBC Scotland.

Source: 14 January 2022, BBC Sport

Football

<https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/59999975>



BETTING

Global

Wild West: gambling advertising at Premier League grounds

Did you place a bet over the Christmas period? You certainly wouldn't be alone. Betting on sports is big business, and the FA Premier League (FAPL) is globally recognised as football's most commercially successful league. And online sports betting is a regulated, legal activity in the UK.

How big a business? Sports betting generated \$490 billion in revenue during 2019, and this is forecast to rise to \$770 billion by 2025. However, it is generally held that this amount is eclipsed by the amount of money wagered on the illegal market.

Due to its unregulated nature, estimating the amount of illegal sports bets wagered each year is tricky. However a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Report recently estimated that \$1.7 trillion is wagered on illegal sports betting markets each year.

In other words, the value of the illegal sports betting market is over three times that of the regulated market. As the UNODC Report notes, organised crime's involvement in illegal betting is equivalent in value to its involvement in drug, human, or arms trafficking.

Of course, the FAPL wants nothing to do with the illegal betting market, or its connections to criminality. But as we approach the third year of the Covid-19 pandemic, clubs are increasingly desperate for revenue. As such, many could be forgiven for being hypnotised by dollar signs.

Rule J.5 of the FAPL Handbook requires its clubs to notify the league about betting partnerships, but the League doesn't regulate such partnerships. It also doesn't regulate which betting companies can advertise at its grounds. This is a concern, as the dividing lines between legal and illegal betting are becoming increasingly blurred.

Twenty six sports betting websites appeared at the 20 FAPL stadiums over the Christmas period. Nine of these 23 betting companies advertised at more than one FAPL game, resulting in 63 separate sports betting company adverts on LED perimeter boards during the 20 game period.

As most LED boards feature a rolling display involving under 15 companies, at some games this involved an almost constant display of gambling advertising during the 90 minutes of on-field play. Some games featured doubly-stacked LED boards equivalent to the height of a player on the TV screen.

The level of betting company advertising during FAPL games makes a mockery of a 'whistle to whistle' TV ban voluntarily agreed by betting companies in 2019, and hailed as a success by the Betting and Gaming Council. It also calls in to question whether proposed UK Government crackdowns on betting sponsorship in football will be effective, unless they include LED perimeter boards.



INTEGRITY IN SPORT

As well as appearing in English, OB Sport's perimeter advertising at Villa Park also advertised OB.com in Mandarin. The advertised link redirects to www.obao76.com, which is entirely in Mandarin. Online gambling is illegal in China, however it is possible that the site may be targeting Mandarin speakers in other countries.

According to a Mandarin disclaimer at the bottom of its homepage, OB.com – or obao76.com – is licensed by the Malta Gaming Authority (MGA), the British Virgin Islands Financial Services Commission, and the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation (PAGCOR). According to the disclaimer, the OB.com brand is owned by Opel Entertainment.

A search through the MGA and PAGCOR internet sites doesn't reveal any licences granted to OB.com or Opel Entertainment. None of the OB.com domains are listed on the MGA's list of licensees. This raises questions as to whether the site is licensed at all.

Information about Opel Entertainment is hard to come by. However a popular Chinese singer, Jeff Chang, was recently forced to defend himself after it was reported that he had agreed a contract to promote a sports betting company. In a 30 December post on Chinese social media platform Weibo, Chang clarified that he had terminated the contract in March 21, which was limited to local use in The Philippines.

The sports betting company concerned with Chang's faux pas? Opel Entertainment. The company also owns Oub121.com, again in Mandarin, which has exactly the same site layout as obao76.com and proudly displays its sponsorship deal with Aston Villa at the bottom of the page.

Events available to Chinese residents on OB's website...

Accessing this website outside of Asia isn't easy. Once registered using a Chinese mobile phone number, Oub121.com allows

users to create a virtual wallet, which can be recharged using crypto currencies, many of which¹ also advertised at FAPL grounds over the Christmas period. Once this is done, a betting window appears which allows users to both watch, and bet on, live sporting events.

As perviously mentioned, online gambling is illegal in China. It would therefore appear that in this particular case, FAPL perimeter LED boards have been used to advertise an application that allows Chinese residents to illegally place online wagers on sporting events.

Opel Entertainment isn't the only company advertising sports betting to Asian audiences. W88.com is Crystal Palace's betting partner, and also appeared on the LED perimeter boards at Crystal Palace vs. Norwich and Leicester City vs. Liverpool on 28 December. 12bet also appeared on the LED perimeter boards during Palace's game against Watford on 28 December, advertising in both English and Mandarin.

At Wolves' foggy 19 December game against Chelsea, MX128.vip was advertised in Mandarin in doubly-stacked LED boards, with static advertising boards promoting gambling companies appearing above this. The MX128.vip site appears to be inaccessible from the UK, where it redirects to ManBetx.uk.

The reason for advertising the .vip domain in Mandarin is unclear. However in September 2020, the British Gambling Commission warned that it would consider banning 'VIP customer' schemes seeking to attract high value customers, as operators were failing to protect them from overspending.

ManBetx is owned by Vivaro, which operates a number of domains including Lovebet, which advertised at the Leicester City vs. Liverpool game on 28 December. Could ManBetx.uk be seeking VIP Asian customers through advertising at FAPL grounds? The company failed to respond to questions.

So how are companies such as Opel Entertainment allowed to advertise their sports betting OB.com brand in Great Britain if they aren't licensed there? For nine of the 23 betting brands advertised over the Christmas period, the answer lies with a company based on the Isle of Man.

OB.com's UK-facing site, www.oubao.co.uk, mentioned that it is 'powered by' TGP Europe, which is regulated by Great Britain's Gambling Commission. The same is true for Fun88.co.uk; SBOtop.co.uk; SportsBetio.co.uk; Stake.uk.com; 12Bet.uk; HTHBet.co.uk; LeyuBet.co.uk; and i8Bet.co.uk.

TGP stands for The Gaming Platform (TGP), its internet site reveals. TGP Europe is not a gambling company, but a technology company that builds websites for clients. Its client page doesn't mention its involvement with HTHBet, LeyuBet, or i8Bet, however its Gambling Commission licence page does.

This lists 31 domains, 14 of which are afforded 'White Label' status. This includes the nine betting operators powered by TGP Europe that advertised at Premier League grounds over the Christmas period. 'White Label' status allows a company licensed by the Gambling Commission to contract provisions of its licensed activities to third parties.

Under Article 1.1.2 of the Gambling Commission's Licensing Conditions and Code of Practice, licensees are responsible for ensuring that third parties are 'bound by the same licence conditions and subject to the same codes of practice as the licensee'. TGP Europe may have done this for the UK-facing domains listed on the Gambling Commission site, however not all sites connected to the nine TGP Europe brands are UK facing.

As previously mentioned there are questions about whether OB Sports' Mandarin site, which featured on FAPL LED perimeter boards over the Christmas period, is licensed at all. At Everton's game against Brighton on 2 January, i8Bet – also powered by TGP Europe – advertised in English, Thai, and Mandarin. Its UK site has yet to launch, but it was able to promote the Thai version of its site, which mentions that it is based in Costa Rica.

Online gambling is illegal in Thailand. Yet as the screenshot on the right shows, the Thai language version of its internet site offers odds on FAPL games, including on events such as corners and bookings. A disclaimer on its internet site mentions that it is the customer's responsibility to ensure that gambling is legal at their location. Of course like OB.com, another brand in the TGP Europe stable, i8Bet may just be advertising to speakers of Mandarin and Thai.

HTHBet.co.uk is another gambling brand powered by TGP Europe. However at Leicester vs. Liverpool on 28 December and at Manchester United vs. Burnley on 30 December, HTH367.com also advertised in Mandarin. The site now redirects to HTHBet.co.uk but at the time of the match, redirected to a Mandarin version of the site that features the same interface as the Mandarin version of OB Sport's site.

The HTH367.com internet site is geoblocked in the UK, however it mentions that HTH is the Global Official Partner of Manchester United; the Official Partner of Leicester City; the Official Regional Partner of AC Milan; the Official Regional Partner of Wolfsburg; and the Official Asian Sponsor of Lille. An 'About Us' section of the website mentions that the site is owned by a

company called China Experience Technology (.). Its corporate website lists its address as RCBC Plaza, Tower 2, Manila, Philippines. The building management company confirmed that it doesn't have China Experience Technology,

Like obao76.com, HTH367.com mentions that it is licensed by the MGA, PAGCOR, and the BVI Financial Services Commission. Like obao76.com, a search through the MGA and PAGCOR internet sites doesn't reveal any licences granted to China Experience Technology or HGH. None of the HTH domains are listed on the MGA's list of licensees.

Fun88 is another gambling brand powered by TGP Europe. At Tottenham vs. Crystal Palace on Boxing Day it advertised Fun369.com, which when accessed through Google (i.e. not directly) redirects to J9.com, the international basketball federation's (FIBA) betting partner. As previously reported, there are serious questions about whether this site is licensed at all.

However at Chelsea's victory over Tottenham in the Carabao EFL Cup semi-final on 12 January, the Mandarin advertised Fun88 domain had changed to Fun279.com. This links to a Mandarin sports betting application listing Fun88's shirt sponsorship with Newcastle United and an Asian betting partnership with Tottenham.

In November, Tottenham renewed its partnership with Fun88. We asked the club if it was aware that adverts at its Stadium were apparently used to promote J9.com.

TGP Europe's registered address is a small office above a betting shop on the Isle of Man. Google Maps reveals that this is an address for a bookmaker.

From such a small base, can TGP Europe be expected to have effective oversight of all the gambling brands promoted by its partners at FAPL grounds? It doesn't even appear to have effective oversight of its partners.

Yabo Sports, a TGP Europe client, boasts Manchester United; Hertha Berlin, AS Monaco, Leicester City and Bayern Munich amongst its partners, which also include the Argentina national team; Italy's Serie A; and the Copa América. It appears that its site has now been rebranded as Betvision.com, another site 'powered by' TGP Europe, after questions were raised about the identity of executives that appeared at sponsorship launches.

YaYu Sports told Hertha Berlin that its a sports entertainment site, yet it has links to OB.com and appears to offer betting odds (click to open)...

There appears to be no mention of Yabo Sports on Manchester United's internet site or on Serie A's list of partners. However, Hertha Berlin lists YaYu.com on its partner list, which is geoblocked from UK access. A media statement mentions that YaYu is a 'leading provider of online sports entertainment services'. however the site can be accessed through Google Translate which shows that it is a gambling site that has connections to OB Sports, which appears to offer sports betting opportunities (see right).

Another new arrival on the scene is Midnight Gaming, whose W88 brand is Crystal Palace's sleeve sponsor. As mentioned, it appeared on LED perimeter boards at the London club's 28 December game against Norwich City; and at Leicester City's game against Liverpool on the same day.

AliQuantam's unassuming Poole address...

The Gambling Commission lists an address in Poole, Dorset, as the company's head office. This is also the address of another company licensed by the Gambling Commission to supply remote gambling software, AliQuantam Gaming Limited. The same Poole address is also listed as an office by gambling payment platform Hexopay.

The Glenmore Centre only lists AliQuantam as registered...

A search on Google Maps reveals that AliQuantam Gaming is the only company registered at this address. AliQuantam's internet site reveals that it is a gaming platform provider, similar to TGP Europe. However, the UK government's Companies House lists AliQuantam Gaming as dissolved in 2010.

Companies House lists Midnight Gaming as owned by AliQuantam and a previous company name, Sporting Black Limited. It also shows that Midnight Gaming transferred its address from London to Poole in September 2020. It also confirms that the main company Director is Alan Hilliard Ehrlich.

Analysis of Companies House documents reveals that Ehrlich resides in Israel and in 2013, was Head of Poker Networks at PartyGaming. In 2011, PartyGaming merged with Bwin, and is now operated by Entain.

A 'Hilly Ehrlich' was mentioned as the Business Development Manager of W88.com by Wolverhampton Wanderers, when it announced its partnership with the betting brand in 2018. This interview confirms that 'Hilly Ehrlich' was also Head of Poker Networks at PartyGaming.

In addition, AliQuantam Gaming appears to be behind an old website linked to both W88 and BR88. Again, the Poole address of AliQuantam Gaming is listed. BR88 was confirmed as Villa's sleeve sponsor in 2019. Hilly Ehrlich was also mentioned when the

club agreed an apparently separate deal with W88 in June 2019.

AliQuantam's internet site mentions that it is licensed in Malta. However a search of the MGA's internet site for either AliQuantam, Midnight Gaming, or BR88 again yields no results. An internet search suggests that W88 may be owned by Marquee Holdings, whose shareholders are listed in the Panama Papers.

W88 isn't the only company connected to FAPL advertising mentioned in the Panama Papers. Vivaro, which operates ManBetX and LoveBet, is also listed. Of course, being listed in the Panama Papers only shows that companies hold offshore bank accounts and doesn't suggest any criminal activity.

The analysis above is designed to show the difficulty that FAPL clubs have in establishing who is behind the betting brands that advertise on their shirts and at their grounds. And if top FAPL clubs have difficulty, it can be assumed that the problem is likely to be worse further down the football pyramid. So what do the FAPL and the Gambling Commission have to say about the situation?

Not my job

The FAPL only regulates the visual aspects of LED perimeter boards, and advised The Sports Integrity Initiative that it is up to clubs to ensure that they remain within the law. There are no restrictions on use of double LED boards, as utilised for Wolves vs. Chelsea through the home club's partnership with ADI. The FAPL said it doesn't permit use of virtual technology to replace advertising featured on LED boards with other brands in non-UK TV markets, although this appears to be contradicted by observers.

LED boards are not sold centrally, but some FAPL clubs use third party agencies² to sell aggregated minutes via multi-club packages. This perhaps explains why LED perimeter advertising at some stadiums appears to be very similar.

'Online gambling operators are required to hold a Gambling Commission licence to transact with British based consumers', read a reply from a Gambling Commission spokesperson to a series of questions. 'If we find an unlicensed operator acting illegally we will take action. A sports body engaging in sponsorship arrangements with an unlicensed remote operator may be liable for the offence of advertising unlawful gambling if the remote gambling activity isn't blocked to consumers in Great Britain and that this is clear to consumers.

'We're of the view that the best way for sports bodies to protect themselves against this risk is to ensure that they only promote gambling operators licensed by us. It is for the owner of the advertising space to satisfy themselves that they are not committing the offence of advertising unlawful gambling.'

Most of the betting brands that featured at FAPL stadiums over the Christmas period have a UK-facing site, often licensed through a White Label agreement with a third party. However as shown above, many of these also have overseas facing websites and mobile applications.

Who is responsible for ensuring that all of these overseas facing websites and mobile applications, often advertised in languages other than English, are legitimate? According to the FAPL, the Gambling Commission is responsible. According to the Gambling Commission, the FAPL clubs are responsible. As the above demonstrates, it appears that nobody is taking responsibility.

The opaque situation that surrounds White Label domains perhaps explains why the UK Government is reviewing their status as part of its Gambling Review. Concerned about gambling's relationship with sport and football in particular, UK Gambling Minister Chris Philp will meet with sporting bodies next week. England's Football Association (FA) has already prohibited betting companies from streaming FA Cup games after Bet365.com's current deal expires at the end of the 2024/5 season.

Of course, it's perfectly legitimate for FAPL clubs to have legal, regulated Asian betting partners. However this article demonstrates the difficulty that clubs face in assessing who is behind such companies, and in ensuring that such partners are not advertising illegal services in foreign languages. And until the FAPL and British Gambling Commission reassert control over this area, draconian restrictions are a real possibility.

Source: <https://www.sportsintegrityinitiative.com/wild-west-gambling-advertising-at-premier-league-grounds/>, 14 January 2022, The Sports Integrity Initiative
<https://www.sportsintegrityinitiative.com/wild-west-gambling-advertising-at-premier-league-grounds/>

ODDS AND ENDS

African Cup of Nations

Controversial refereeing at AFCON 2022: Full-time at 85 minutes, restarts, official with tainted past

The African Cup of Nations Group F match between Mali and Tunisia on Wednesday was supposed to give a glimpse into the title credentials of the two contenders. However, after a cagey first half, the second period of the match turned farcical following some highly controversial decisions and timekeeping by Zambian referee Janny Sikazwe.

Mali won the match 1-0 thanks to a second-half penalty by Ibrahima Kone but it was the referee who will make the headlines, for all the wrong reasons. Sikazwe – who has been suspended before on allegations of corruption – gave two highly-controversial penalties, flashed an even more debatable red card and blew the full-time whistle twice – once after 85 minutes and the second time with 11 seconds of normal time still left to play.

The tournament officials tried to restart the match – 40 minutes after it ‘ended’ – but Tunisian players did not take the field. Here is how the drama unfolded in the Cameroonian city of Limbe.

48’: Controversial penalty – goal

The referee awards a controversial penalty to Mali after Tunisian midfielder Ellyes Skhiri blocks a shot from Boubakar Kouyaté with his arms. Tunisia protested, arguing the arm was in its natural position but the referee didn’t budge. Ibrahima Kone takes the penalty and sends goalkeeper Bechir Ben Said the wrong way to give Mali the lead.

75’: Controversial penalty – missed

This time, Sikazwe awards a controversial penalty to Tunisia after the ball hits the arm of a Mali defender. Once again, it looks like the arm was in its natural position and the referee is asked by the VAR to take a look at the pitchside screen. After looking at the replays, Sikazwe points to the spot. However, Wahbi Khazri shot is palmed away by goalkeeper Ibrahim Mounkoro.

85’: Full time

As Tunisia presses ahead in a desperate search for the equalising goal, Sikazwe looks at his watch and blows the full-time whistle. With no timer in the stadium, and nothing on the giant screen, the game is halted and the players appear confused, while the Tunisian dugout is up in arms. After realising his mistake, the referee signals for the play to continue.

87’: Controversial red card



Mali’s El Bilal Toure is shown a straight red card for a late tackle on Dylan Bronn. Most referees wouldn’t even have given a yellow, so the sending off infuriates the Mali bench. The VAR steps in and advises Sikazwe to review his decision. The referee takes a look and sticks to his decision, much to the disbelief of the players. Mali are reduced to 10 men with at least three minutes remaining.

89:49’: Full time

With the regular time coming to an end, the fourth official looks set to signal added time but Sikazwe doesn’t wait for it and blows the full-time whistle once again, this time with 11 seconds remaining. Tunisia coach Mondher Kebaier and the rest of the coaching staff storm onto the pitch and charge towards the referee, pointing at their watches. In an instant, the match officials are surrounded by security guards for their protection and are ushered off the pitch.

Post-match drama

Twenty minutes after the ‘full-time’ whistle, Mali coach Mohamed Magassouba was speaking at the post-match press conference when the Confederation of African Football officials interrupted the proceedings, implying that the remaining time would be played out. A full 40 minutes later, it was decided that the match would indeed resume. Mali players re-emerged on the pitch and fourth official Helder Martins de Carvalho replaced Sikazwe as the main referee. However, Tunisians did not turn up. After waiting for a while, Carvalho blew the final whistle – for the third time in the match – and brought an end to a highly-controversial match.

Players were taking ice bath’

Tunisia’s coach Kebaier called the referee’s decisions ‘inexplicable’ and said his players were taking ice baths when they were recalled on the pitch. “The players were taking ice baths for 35 minutes before they were called back out again,” Kebaier said, according to Reuters. “I’ve been coaching for a long time and have never seen anything like it. Even the fourth official was preparing to lift the board (to show how many minutes of injury-time) and then the whistle was blown.”

Referee's tainted past

This isn't the first time Sikazwe has been embroiled in a controversy. An experienced referee, he has officiated the 2016 Club World Cup final, the 2017 African Cup of Nations final between Cameroon and Egypt and two games at the 2018 World Cup, Belgium vs Panama and Japan vs Poland. However, he was suspended in November 2018 by the CAF on suspicion of corruption during an African Champions League match between Esperance and Primeiro Agosto. Esperance won the match 4-2. However, Sikazwe had awarded them a controversial penalty, which led to their first goal and later ruled out an Agosto goal for a perceived foul. His suspension was lifted by FIFA in January 2019.

Source: 12 January 2022, Indian Express

Football

<https://indianexpress.com/article/sports/football/controversial-refereeing-at-afcon-full-time-at-85-minutes-restarts-official-with-tainted-past-7719846/lite/>

Macau (China)

Macau to limit new casino licences to 10 years : Government

HONG KONG: Macau on Friday (Jan 14) unveiled plans to slash the duration of new gaming licences to just 10 years, half the length awarded the last time concessions were granted, as authorities tighten regulation of the world's biggest casino hub.

The Chinese territory's multibillion-dollar gaming industry has been on tenterhooks ever since officials announced plans to overhaul the sector last September.

On Friday, the city's six casino giants got their first clear indication of what the new rules would look like as Macau's Executive Council said gaming must not undermine China's "national security".

Under a proposed bill, the number of gaming concessions will remain at six but "will not exceed 10 years", authorities said.

In exceptional situations, concessions "can be extended by a maximum of three years".

The proposal would slash the amount of time casino operators can hold their concessions, which come up for renewal in June.

The former Portuguese colony is the only place in China where casino gambling is allowed. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, it raked in more in a single week than Las Vegas makes in a month.

For decades the industry was a monopoly run by casino magnate Stanley Ho. But in 2002 authorities opened up to five competitors, who were all granted 20-year concessions.

The gaming sector then exploded into a US\$24 billion industry.

Its operations usually account for about 80 per cent of government revenue and more than half its gross domestic product, with upwards of 82,000 people working in the industry by the end of 2020, almost a fifth of the city's working population.

The city also used to be something of a free-for-all for wealthy officials and business figures, both as a place to gamble huge amounts of money and to skirt China's strict rules on how much cash can be taken out of the country.

But under China's President Xi Jinping, authorities have cracked down on money laundering as well as VIP junkets, and Macau authorities in more recent years have tried to diversify away from the gaming sector.

The industry has also been hammered by the coronavirus, which put a stop to almost all arrivals from mainland China, who make up the vast majority of Macau gamblers.

Gaming revenue plunged to US\$7.5 billion in 2020 as the pandemic struck.

It recovered a little the following year at US\$10.8 billion but that figure is still down 70 per cent down on pre-pandemic levels.

Source: 14 January 2022, Channel News Asia

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/macau-limit-new-casino-licenses-10-years-2436091>

MATCH FIXING

Laos

Laos criticizes 45 soccer players banned for match fixing in recent years

Lao soccer authorities revealed last week that 45 of the Southeast Asian country's players have been banned for life by FIFA for match fixing in recent years, condemning the footballers for putting themselves over the nation.

Lao Football Federation General Secretary Kanya Keomany told a news conference Jan. 7 that FIFA, the world soccer governing body, banned the 45 male players for their involvement with match fixing schemes.

"This match fixing practice has been directly affecting the selection of our soccer players for our national team for future regional and international competitions," she said, without mentioning names or specific dates.

"The federation has been consistently educating our athletes to be well disciplined especially before each international competition, but obviously, these players did not heed our advice. They chose their personal interest over the country's," the federation's vice-president Khampheng Vongkhanti told the news conference.

"Their actions have ruined their own reputation and the country's," he added.

The announcement came on the heels of last month's ASEAN Cup, where the Lao team lost all four of its matches, scoring only one goal,

"The federation received a lot of complaints from soccer fans... who said that the Lao male national soccer team competed poorly in the ASEAN Football Federation Championship in December last year," a former official of the Lao Sports Department told RFA's Lao Service.

A federation official, who requested anonymity for professional reasons, confirmed the 45 life bans to RFA, saying, "This number includes the players who were banned in 2020. The Lao Football Federation will not reveal the identities of any of these players."

In 2020 three Lao footballers—Khampheng Sayavutthi, Lembo Saysana, and goalkeeper Thipphonexay Inthavongsa—were banned from the sport when they were found guilty of conspiring to manipulate the score of an October 2017 match against Hong Kong. Laos lost that match 0-4.

Additionally, FIFA in 2017 issued lifetime bans to 22 Lao and Cambodian players and officials who were affiliated with the national team or Lao Toyota FC, including 15 players who had played for the club or were at that time on the active roster.

Laos was banned from the 2018 Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Cup as a result.

Lao soccer fans told RFA that local players can be easily tempted because they are not well paid.

"Some of the soccer players accept bribes because they don't get enough financial support from the federation. Our players don't earn as much compared to those from other countries," a soccer fan from the capital Vientiane told RFA Monday.

"They do get paid, but the cost of living in Laos is high. If someone offered them a large sum of money, they'd take it and fix the match," the fan said.

The fan noted that in the announcement, the Lao Football Federation did not identify any of the people who bribed the players, but said it might be gamblers who give money to players, especially to goalkeepers, to allow the opponent to score a specific number of goals.

"I feel bad for the players," another fan told RFA.

"We don't know all the details yet. I've heard the news, but the upper levels are not revealing all the details," the second fan said.

The guilty players will not be severely punished, a former official of the Lao Sports Department told RFA.

"They did it for their personal financial gain. Their gain is much higher than what they get from the government," the official said.

"They won't be jailed. They may just be banned for life," said the official.

Current FIFA rankings place Laos at 187th in the world, 41st in the AFC.

RFA attempted to contact FIFA to verify the bans but received no answer as of Monday evening.

Source: 10 January 2022, Radio Free Asia

Football

<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/laos/soccer-01102022194640.html>

Sweden

The futsal stars also appeal match-fixing decisions to HD

Last week, Pawel Cibicki appealed his match-fixing verdict to the Supreme Court. Now the doomed futsal stars have done the same. They want to be acquitted of their respective judgments.

Cibicki was sentenced in December by the Court of Appeal to a suspended sentence for taking bribes and gambling in an all-Swedish football match in the spring of 2019, a verdict that he appealed to the Supreme Court last week.

It is now clear that two of the other convicted persons in the match-fixing scandal have also appealed their verdicts.

This applies to the two former national team players in futsal.

Denies crime

One was sentenced to a suspended sentence for giving a bribe and gambling cheating regarding the same match that Cibicki was sentenced for (as Cibicki according to the verdict must have taken a yellow card to get a loan of 300,000 kronor), and the other for taking a bribe and gambling in the so-called Kvarnby case.

This case concerned a club that then played in division 3, when the person in question must have received money to ensure that the team would lose.

Watch SVT's documentary "Kvarnbyfallet" on SVT Play.

All the convicted persons deny the crime, and want the Supreme Court to ensure that the prosecution is dismissed.

However, the futsal players' lawyers have not justified why HD should take up the matter, but they have asked to submit their arguments next week.

It is unusual for the Supreme Court to grant a so-called leave to appeal.

HD writes on its website that they receive about 6,000 appeals per year.

Only just over 100 of them receive a trial permit.

Source: 13 January 2022, Teller Report

Football

<https://www.tellerreport.com/sports/2022-01-13-the-futsal-stars-also-appeal-match-fixing-decisions-to-hd.B1w6tD6nt.html>

