



SPEECH • DISCOURS • DISCURSO • خطابات

Opening remarks

by

Mr Ronald K. Noble

INTERPOL Secretary General

INTERPOL Global Academic Experts Meeting for Integrity in Sport

Singapore

28 November 2012

Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Senior Minister of State for Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs of Singapore,
Mr Simone Farina, FIFA Ambassador for fair play and coach at Aston Villa,

Mr John Abbott, Chairman of the INTERPOL Integrity in Sport Steering Group,

Other distinguished guests and participants,

Colleagues from INTERPOL,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning,

I hope you will excuse me for beginning my remarks with some disturbing images.

On 1 March 2012, Robert Kutasi, the director of a Hungarian football club, jumped to his death from the sixteenth floor of a building in Budapest after a scandal erupted in Hungary implicating players of his club in the fixing of matches several years earlier.

Move forward from Hungary to South Korea, just over a month later. On 14 April, a 24-year old named Lee Kyung Hwan jumped to *his* death after being punished for his involvement in match-fixing there. Lee's was the fourth suicide that resulted from match-fixing in South Korea.

I can go on: no fewer than 15 football directors have been murdered in Bulgaria in the last decade, a Canadian reporter received death threats, a Greek reporter was beaten with brass knuckles by unknown assailants after trying to shine a light on the phenomenon of match-fixing, and four journalists investigating match-fixing have been killed.

Despair, death and violence may not be what comes to mind when we think of match-fixing. But they are some – though certainly not all – of its poisonous fruits.

Let's start from the beginning. What is match-fixing?

Match-fixing is the illegal practice of arranging in advance to alter the natural progression or outcome of a game of sport. It is often intimately connected to, and driven by, illegal betting that follows.

In its most blunt forms, match-fixing can mean that someone involved in the game, most commonly a player, group of players, or referee, will "throw" a game. But part of what makes match-fixing so insidious, so difficult to deal with, is that it could involve fixing actions that don't necessarily affect the outcome of the game. Actions such as the time of the first goal, which team will score first, who will get the first free-kick, which team will score the first goal or the last goal, what the score at half-time will be, how many goals will be scored during a particular time period of the game, which team or player will take the first corner kick, if a particular player will get injured or penalized. The list is as endless as the possibilities in the game itself.

Match-fixing requests can sometimes seem innocuous to the player being approached by a friend or family member. After all, making sure a certain player gets the first throw-in doesn't really affect who wins the match... does it? Who does it really hurt?

In order to understand the harm caused by match-fixing, we need a sense of how wide reaching it is and the vastness of the illegal betting market that drives it. To be candid, no one really knows the size of the illegal betting market, but from all reports it is huge. Reports estimate the size to be in the range of hundreds of billions of euros per year. The sizes of the bets can be in the tens, and even hundreds of thousands of euros. There are estimates that the large Asian bookmakers have revenues on the same scale as the Coca Cola company.

Until now I've highlighted harms caused by match-fixing in the forms of suicide and violence. But the harms go further than those. It is important to note that match-fixing is a significant cash-cow for criminal syndicates.

In order to engage in match-fixing, they engage in bribery, threats, and extortion. The billions of dollars that they make each year are stolen from unwitting bettors throughout the world as well as from the tax revenues of governments. Match-fixing jeopardizes the interests of the sports clubs and teams. Careers are destroyed, lives are ruined. The credibility, and as a result the financial viability, of professional sports is eroded. The recent suicides are just the tip of the iceberg.

To add to the damage, criminal organizations use the betting markets as a way to launder moneys from their other illegal activities, and use the proceeds of match-fixing and illegal gambling to finance those other activities, which include the sex trade, the drug trade, counterfeiting, and trafficking in illegal goods.

The cornerstone upon which this destructive criminal enterprise rests is the ability of the criminals to corrupt the key actors in sports, primarily the players, the team officials, and the referees. The questions that lie before us are: How do we educate and influence the players, team officials and referees so that they do not give in to the corruptive influence of the fixers? How do we convince them that doing something that doesn't change the outcome of the game – like getting the first penalty or the first throw-in – is actually corrupt, illegal, and harmful? I ask you to keep these questions in mind throughout this conference.

Now we come to the crux of the matter: What has been done to combat match-fixing, and what remains to be done?

One side of the solution is through law-enforcement operations at the national and international level. At the national level there have been investigations in Asia (China, South Korea and Malaysia,) in Africa (Zimbabwe and South Africa) as well as in Europe (Italy, Germany, Finland and Turkey.) In fact, just this week Italy's state police, working together with Serbia and INTERPOL, arrested a former football player with connections to a Singapore-based crime syndicate. He is charged with match-fixing over a three year period in Italy's Serie A and Serie B leagues. It is important to note that this arrest is a direct result of the courageous actions of Simone Farina, from whom you'll hear next, when he not only refused a bribe, but also reported it to the Italian State Police.

This example of national authorities using INTERPOL to arrest international fugitives ties into our law enforcement efforts at the international level, in which INTERPOL, with its 190 member countries, has provided logistical support to law enforcement agencies around the world and has helped coordinate international operations targeting match-fixing and illegal betting.

We have conducted several successful international operations against illegal betting and match-fixing throughout Asia, under the code name SOGA. In 2007, we started Operation SOGA I in coordination with China, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The first SOGA operation resulted in 260 successful raids leading to more than 400 arrests. Almost USD 700,000 in cash were seized, and almost USD 700 million in bets were on the table at the time of the operation.

In 2008, 2010, and again this year, we launched operation SOGA II, III and IV, with similar success: thousands of arrests, billions of US dollars of bets interdicted, and millions of dollars of cash seized.

From a law enforcement perspective, the work is ongoing. We are on the right path, but it is only part of the solution.

Another side of the solution is through education and prevention. In 2011, we entered into a historic 10 year agreement with FIFA, the leading international football organization. For the purpose of furthering education and training to combat match-fixing and illegal betting, FIFA gave INTERPOL the largest private donation it had ever received.

Since that historic agreement, we have been working to deepen our understanding of the problem match-fixing presents. Our goal is to create educational curricula tailored to the most at-risk groups in football so that we can inoculate as many players, coaches, team officials and referees as possible against the threat and temptations of corruption.

Why we need you.

We need the best minds and the best resources to help understand this problem better and chart our way forward. We must understand better in order to educate better. The problem is multi-faceted and interdisciplinary, and it demands a similarly multi-faceted and interdisciplinary approach to deal with it.

What is the best way to impart the ethical education necessary to resist the “grey areas” that face players, the corruption that on the surface might not seem so bad? What principles can we establish that will prepare them? How do these models differ when we wish to aim our efforts at players, and when we wish to aim them at referees or team officials? What type of ongoing education do we put in place to make sure that our anti-corruption efforts have a continuing and lifelong influence on the recipients?

We must develop curricula for anti-corruption education for players, referees, coaches and team officials that will be carefully tailored to them and will use the most modern and up-to-date face-to-face and on-line educational tools that are available to effectively reach the at-risk groups anywhere in the world.

We must deliver this education and training through certifications and coursework that will integrate players and referees in the process and that will be given by the people and institutions whose *raison d'être* lies in successful education: You.

We must partner with you to achieve these goals.

The great philosopher PLATO wrote that “the direction in which education starts a person will determine that person’s future in life.”

I would add for the challenge before us, that the education we must provide has to be an ongoing and lifelong process so that it can become an integral part of the worldview of the players, referees, team officials, and coaches who receive it.

We have an opportunity to create that education for the millions of men and women and girls and boys around the world so closely linked to the game of football, and in so doing, to help determine a future for them--and for the billions whose lives they touch. A future that is founded on honesty and integrity.

Thank you.