



SPEECH • DISCOURS • DISCURSO • خطاب

Remarks

by

Simone Farina

FIFA Ambassador for Fair Play

**INTERPOL Global Academic Experts Meeting
for Integrity in Sports**

28 November 2012

Singapore

Mr Masagos ZULKIFLI, Senior Minister of State for Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs, Singapore,
Mr. Ronald K. NOBLE, Secretary General of INTERPOL,
Ladies and Gentleman,

It all started at newspaper stand in Rome where my father worked.

From as young as I can remember, I would come to visit him outside school hours and on weekends.

Without distracting the customers too much, I wandered through the stand, examining everything.

But, the first place I always went to when I arrived was the sports section.

Although there were many magazines to choose from, my eyes were always drawn to the ones covering football, and my hands quickly followed.

As I would read through these magazines, and look at the photos of players in action, I dreamed of playing football for the rest of my life.

I hoped to become the best player possible, so that one day it would be my photo in these magazines.

As a natural athlete and with strong crossing skills, I eventually settled in at the fullback position and played in different *Serie* of the Italian league throughout my career.

Today, I am one of the lucky few out of millions of children and players who have been able to see their dream of playing football professionally become reality.

But now, I am in football magazines more for what I did off the field than on it.

This is because one day last year, I received an invitation from a former teammate to meet at a bar.

There, he asked me to help my team, *AS Gubbio*, lose by three or more goals against a better team, *Cesena*, which, as a defender, I was in a position to control.

For my cooperation, he offered me EUR 200,000.

I was told that this amount was guaranteed because of his support from an organization based here in Singapore.

Almost instinctively, my response to him right there in the bar was clear: “no”.

I said “no” for several reasons:

I knew it was wrong.

Cheating is against everything I have learned and experienced as a player, such as fair play and respect for team members as well as opponents.

I knew that the Italian League, UEFA and FIFA all had laws against bribery and match-fixing, and that these laws punish players for not reporting it, placing them at risk of losing the opportunity to play football ever again.

I said no because my immediate thoughts were of my wife, son and daughter.

How could I look them in the eye if I said yes?

What kind of husband and father would I be?

I frequently get asked: if I could do it all over again would I still turn down the offer and report my former teammate to the authorities?

To be very honest: It was not any easy time for me and my family. I often felt alone, and sometimes questioned my decision.

I quickly realized its importance, however, after it resulted in the arrest of almost 20 individuals and well-known players the following month.

I never imagined reporting the case would have the impact it did.

As my story unfolded and was covered by more television programmes and newspapers, it became overwhelming.

What helped me through it was the invaluable support of FIFA, Aston Villa and INTERPOL, who continued to stand by me along with my family and friends.

This was important at a time when management of my club did not.

Now, working with the INTERPOL Integrity in Sports Programme and as the FIFA Ambassador for Fair Play, I am helping to spread the message to everyone in sport that they are not alone and should not be afraid.

Rather, a network, which includes INTERPOL and FIFA, is ready to get behind you when you say “no” and report a match-fixing attempt or corruption.

While I am honoured to be in this position, my vision is that one day the decision I made will not be treated as the exception, but rather the rule.

This is why the work of the Integrity in Sports Program is so crucial.

Through awareness training and education worldwide, this programme gives more players, referees, owners and sports clubs the information they need on the procedures and authorities that must be contacted when they are faced with a case of corruption or match-fixing.

Our focus though cannot be limited to professional leagues and superstars.

Prevention starts with tomorrow’s athletes – children.

During my childhood, I was taught that sport was not just about a ball and a goal – but rather about building us into men and women of honour and integrity.

Now, programmes for children promote sport as about money and celebrity, leading them into believing that this is what it is truly about.

But it is not.

The need to see a change is what led me to take up a position in the Football Development Unit of *Aston Villa*.

In running programmes for children, I focus on teaching them the same respect, courage, determination and teamwork I learned from the game in my childhood.

All values which helped me to say “no” one year ago, and all values I believe will help them say “no” in the future.

Thank you.