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SENTENCES/SANCTIONS

China

Four Chinese shuttlers penalised for illegal betting, tanking matches

The four men's doubles players were found to have violated BWF rules on betting, wagering, and irregular match results for failing to put in best efforts to win a match at the Fuzhou China Open 2018.

The Badminton World Federation has penalised four Chinese shuttlers with probation for violating tournament rules.

The four men's doubles players, He Jiting, Tan Qiang, Li Junhui (now retired), and Liu Yuchen were found to have violated BWF rules on betting, wagering, and irregular match results for failing to put in best efforts to win a match at the Fuzhou China Open 2018, the world governing body of badminton said in a statement on Friday.

The hearing panel issued three-month bans from all badminton-related activities to each player, but the sentences were suspended for a probationary period of two years starting from January 25, 2022.

Should there be any repeat offences within the two-year probation period, the three-month bans will take effect, it said, adding each player was also required to forfeit their prize money from the Fuzhou China Open 2018, reports Xinhua.

As per the Judicial Procedures, the athletes had the right to appeal the decision at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) within 21 days of the notice of the reasoned decision. However, no appeal was lodged.

For its part, the Chinese Badminton Association said in a statement that it respects the decision and would ensure the punishments are executed while implementing further internal punishments.

"In the future, the association will continue to strengthen the education and team management, and ensure that athletes cherish every opportunity to compete," it said.

Source: 26 March 2022, the Herald

Badminton

<https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/sports/four-chinese-shuttlers-penalised-for-illegal-betting-tanking-matches>



Uganda

Two Ugandan officials banned from football for 25 years over match fixing

Local football governing body, FUFA has banned two Ugandan club officials for a total of 25 years from participating in any football related activities after being found guilty of involvement in match fixing.

In decisions announced on Wednesday, the FUFA Ethics and Disciplinary Committee banned Police FC marketing and Chief Executive Officer, Abraham Luzzi from taking part in any football related football activity for 10 years when he breached Articles 27, 31 and 44 of the FUFA Ethics and Disciplinary Code related to the manipulation of football matches and competitions, failure to report and breach of general duties of conduct.

“Mr. Luzzi was found guilty for approaching a player to influence and manipulate the result of the Uganda Cup match between Five Stars FC and Tooro United FC,”FUFA said in a statement.

In a game played in January at the Works Playground in Entebbe, Tooro United eliminated fourth division team, Five Stars FC 8-7 on penalties after the game had ended in a barren draw in normal time of the round of 64 in the Uganda Cup.

According to FUFA Luzzi was involved in fixing this game.

In the same vein, the local football governing body also banned one James Kaweesa for 15 years without getting near any football related activities both local and international for being involved in fixing the Uganda Cup round of 64 match between Five Stars FC and Tooro United.

He is accused, just like Luzzi of approaching a player to influence the said game.

In a shocking decision, sports journalist, David Isabirye was also banned from taking part in any football related activities for two years over the same scandal.

According to FUFA, Isabirye is accused of failure to report the incident of match fixing in the same game that he covered in his capacity as a journalist.

“Isabirye also failed to provide valid and acceptable evidence to show that he had fulfilled his duty to report the illegal conduct,” FUFA said.

However, it is expected that the officials and the journalist will appeal the decision of the local football governing body.

Source: 24 March 2022, *The Independent Uganda*

Football

<https://www.independent.co.ug/ugandan-match-fixing-king-pin-banned/>



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United States

'Uncle Mick' Gets 18 Months for Running Chicago-Area Illegal Sports Betting Ring

The man who led an intricate Chicago-area illegal sports betting operation found out Wednesday that he'll serve 18 months in federal prison for his crimes.

Vincent "Uncle Mick" DelGiudice was sentenced in a Chicago federal court after pleading guilty last year to gambling and conspiracy charges. In addition to the prison time, US District Judge Virginia Kendall also ordered the 58-year-old to forfeit \$3.6 million in ill-gotten gains.

It's uncertain when DelGiudice will report to prison and begin serving his sentence.

House Raided

The scheme made millions, with prosecutors saying DelGiudice used the proceeds to make cash investments in businesses. At times, he also had bettors who owed him to pay off some of his personal expenses.

While cloaked with a professional veneer and flashy website, this was a sordid operation," assistant US attorney Terry M. Kinney wrote in the prosecution's sentencing memo. "He preyed upon individuals' addictions to line his pockets."

When federal agents raided DelGiudice's house two years ago, they found more than \$1 million in cash, \$350,000 in silver and jewelry, and more than \$90,000 in gold coins.

Few Got Jail Time

Federal authorities charged 10 people in connection with the sports betting ring. Besides DelGiudice, only a couple of others in the case received prison time for their roles.

One who did was former Chicago police officer Nicholas Stella, who received a 15-month sentence in July 2021. However, records from the US Bureau of Prisons show authorities released Stella from custody on Jan. 20, 2022.

Gregory Paloian, a bookmaker connected with DelGiudice but charged separately, received a two-and-a-half-year sentence last April. However, the BOP database shows him as not being in custody. Media reports indicate Paloian was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer last year.

Some of those involved received either probation, home incarceration, or both. That included Eugene "Geno" DelGiudice, Vincent's father, who received a three-month home confinement sentence in October 2020.

Last September, Matthew Knight received a six-month community confinement sentence, two years of probation, and a \$10,000 fine.

Most of those charged in the gambling ring was initially looking at up to five years in prison.

Urlacher Pardoned

Perhaps the highest-profile defendant in the case was Casey Urlacher, brother of legendary Chicago Bears linebacker Brian Urlacher. Casey Urlacher also was the mayor of Mettawa, Ill., a small suburban village just north of Chicago.

In January 2021, then-President Trump pardoned Urlacher in one of his last acts in the White House. Urlacher then ran for reelection last April and won.

Source: 10 March 2022, *Casino.org*

<https://www.casino.org/news/uncle-mick-gets-18-months-for-running-chicago-area-illegal-sports-betting-ring/>

Valve

Multiple top Dota 2 pros permabanned by Valve for match-fixing

Lai "AhJit" Jay Son and Cheng "vtFded" Jia Hao are among a number of Southeast Asian Dota 2 pros now being banned for match-fixing and collusion.

On the morning of March 12, Beyond the Summit announced the sudden disqualification of Team Orca from the upcoming Dota Pro Circuit tour. No explanation was given for the decision beyond the promise that further news would come soon.

Later that day, Beyond the Summit followed up on this by announcing that Team Orca and another squad, Team Apex, had been sharing accounts in order to help one another qualify for the upcoming tour of the Dota Pro Circuit's Southeast Asian league. The tournament organizer said a separate investigation also uncovered evidence of probable match-fixing by the two teams in third-party tournaments including the BTS Pro Series.

Because of this, all 10 players from the teams have been dealt a permanent ban from Valve events. BTS revealed the full list of players who had been banned:

As a result of this move, AhJit and vtFaded now find themselves on Valve's banned list. This effectively ends their professional Dota 2 careers, as they will no longer be able to compete in any DPC events, Dota 2 majors, or The International.

AhJit has been playing at an elite level since 2016, competing with most of Southeast Asia's top organizations along the way. This includes an appearance at The International 2017 with Fnatic. At the start of the 2019-2020 DPC season, AhJit moved to China and bounced between multiple organizations before returning to Southeast Asia after The International 2021.

vtFaded's career followed the same general path, playing on multiple notable SEA squads before moving to China. This run ended in 2019 shortly after joining EHOME, where he had a public dispute with coach Zhang "xiao8" Ning. Despite those troubles, he was a clear talent which saw him loaned to multiple teams including Cloud9's short-lived SEA squad.

To fill the gap left by Orca in the DPC, a closed qualifier series will be played. The competition includes Team M 11, M Y, Kobolds, and The Apes E-Sport.

Source: 13 March 2022, Win

eSports

<https://win.gg/news/multiple-top-dota-2-pros-permabanned-by-valve-for-match-fixing/>



ODDS AND ENDS

Australia

Women's sports betting is on the rise; Cricket Australia steps up integrity measures

Betting on women's cricket has grown at a truly astonishing rate. Check out the staggering numbers and see how the game leaders try to stay ahead.

Cricket Australia has reinstated a crucial integrity task it scrapped during Covid to bolster its attack on corruption amid an explosion of women's game betting.

Since the arrival of the Women's Big Bash League in 2015-16, cricket insiders say women's cricket betting has increased by as much as 800 percent annually.

Bookmakers estimate that women's cricket has been the most bet on women's sports in the world, after established WNBA basketball and Grand Slam tennis, and it's not uncommon for a regular WBBL game to now trade over \$10 million on a betting exchange like Betfair.

There are more than 1000 betting sites internationally where gamblers can bet on matches of the current Women's World Cup in New Zealand, as well as numerous illegal betting shops operating mainly from the subcontinent and now also taking an interest in the women's game.

With women's cricketers largely underpaid compared to their male counterparts – especially abroad where the tentacles of the game's seedy underbelly are rife – integrity experts fear that women's cricket (along with underage cricket) has become the top risk area when it comes to anti-corruption.

Cricket Australia is bolstering its resources to counter the threat by advertising a new 'Integrity Analyst' to join the team led by Jacqui Partridge, Head of Integrity.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 raised eyebrows as Cricket Australia made the key intelligence-gathering function obsolete as part of 40 job cuts across the board.

By doing so, industry insiders felt that CA had diminished its capacity to protect the game and wondered why it cut off a division of the organization whose maintenance should be paid for by the significant product fees that cricket collects from sports companies each year.



Instead, the Integrity Analyst role has been fulfilled since 2020 through the combination of Security and Anti-Corruption Manager and Integrity Support roles and complemented by additional services by global sports data company Sportradar.

However, News Corp can reveal that all this is about to change as the game responds to several changing trends such as the influx of a large number of new online gambling providers into the market and the opening of new markets in countries like the US.

News Corp understands that in recent years CA has received more reports of suspicious approaches from women's cricketers – especially in the WBBL – than men's cricket.

Therefore, the 'Integrity Analyst' is considered an essential weapon in continuously monitoring betting patterns so that intelligence can be analyzed against what is going on.

It's clear that the 'Integrity Analyst' will play an important role in developing deeper relationships with reporting and regulatory betting entities, showing that the game takes seriously that women's cricket has become a lucrative sports betting heavyweight in its own right.

"CA is aware that women's cricket betting has increased significantly. But we have taken a huge number of preventive and educational measures and various codes and policies to ensure the integrity of cricket and the safety of all our participants," Partridge told News Corp.

"We are working closely with the ICC and other national cricket anti-corruption units, law enforcement agencies and gambling providers to enforce a strict anti-corruption process and share information.

"And we know we need to remain vigilant about potential integrity threats to all of our participants and throughout all competitions, and we're constantly monitoring the evolving landscape to identify new risks."

Women's cricket betting is growing exponentially.

“When the women are playing, it’s all over the TV. We feel in the WBBL, it has gone to a higher level this year,” said Gerard Daffy of the TAB.

“It’s not as big as what men’s cricket betting is. But that said, it does have a pretty good stranglehold on women’s sports betting.”

Cricket Australia has a proven track record of protecting the WBBL and its domestic women’s leagues from the evils of corruption – but the warning bells are there that constant vigilance is required.

News Corp spoke to an international commentator who was approached about the weather conditions during her playing days.

The incident has occurred since the advent of the WBBL era, and was immediately reported to authorities after a shady social media character made an approach.

Last year, during a WBBL match in Sydney’s western Blacktown, cricket officials spotted what is known as a ‘pitch sider’.

Pitchsiders try to take advantage of delays in television broadcasts abroad by invoking live action reports for offshore bettors to get bets on what’s going to happen in the game.

It’s not match-fixing because no players are involved, but it’s a gambling market manipulation that worries authorities about the possibility of these kinds of opportunities being exploited by criminal activity.

WBBL games in suburban venues like Blacktown and Drummoyne Oval are vulnerable to field clearing — as well as more sinister anti-corruption threats — because they’re essentially open parks that are more difficult to control and secure than large stadiums.

For example, pitch siding operators can sit outside the venue and still watch the match without violating their eligibility rules.

Cricket researchers have in the past found examples of illegal bettors in India and the subcontinent who would bet against betting agencies such as BetFair and use pitchsiders during the match to gain an edge based on broadcast delays.

Betfair has a five second delay when placing bets on live play to best protect itself from exploitation.

Some insiders have a much bigger soft spot for the game that emerged this summer.

All first class quality cricket in NSW and Victoria is now live streamed online and agencies have started running markets for these matches which do not have integrity checks on them.

For example, WBBL and BBL cricket players must hand in their phones before entering the Player and Match Official Access zones, but in premier cricket players can still have their phones with them.

In late 2019, Cricket Australia’s integrity chiefs were heavily criticized for throwing the book at Hobart Hurricanes player Emily Smith for innocently breaking the game’s anti-corruption laws by posting a team sheet on social media as a joke.

Smith had no intention of posting inside information in the public domain, she was just joking at her own expense about her low batting order – and in any case, the game had rained out and never went through.

Cricket Australia enforced a strict 12-month ban for violating its anti-corruption rules, who was accused of being a heavy-hander due to the mitigating factors described above and the fact that she had a small salary as a fringe female player.

Supporters of CA’s stance, however, pointed out that as a woman you can influence gambling earnings just as much as you can a man, and Smith and all Australian players are well informed about anti-corruption rules and regulations.

The same goes for the Australian World Cup squad currently in New Zealand who were treated to a full anti-corruption briefing by International Cricket Council officials before the start of the tournament.

The fact that cricket leagues and women’s leagues around the world are increasingly televised as the game grows means that it will increasingly become a target for corruption.

But ICC Integrity boss Alex Marshall says unlike Australia’s national ranks, in the international game at this stage, the number of illegal approaches to female players is far less than what is seen in the male game.

Nevertheless, the ICC keeps a watchful eye during the World Cup.

“Up to a year out, we make sure we have good relations with law enforcement in the country because in New Zealand and Australia, for example, match fixing and corruption in sports is a crime,” Marshall told News Corp.

“Where applicable and where it is legal to do it, we will share the information about known international corrupters who could attempt to come to that country during the World Cup so that if that country so wishes, their border agency can use that data to prevent those people coming in.

“We then assess which teams are most at risk and work with those teams early to conduct additional educational sessions. We then deploy a two-person intelligence team to be in the country prior to the event and for the entire event.

“We have four anti-corruption managers at every game, we have intelligence information at every game. We’ll do what we can to keep an eye out for any active corrupters that we think might show up and then we’ll have an investigative team back in Dubai who would pick up any investigations and send them to New Zealand in the event that there was a significant investigation would be launched.

“Each team has a full training session prior to the start of the tournament, where they receive the latest news on corruption, anti-doping and safety.”

Cricket Australia also runs its own education programs tailored specifically to each level of play and deploys security and anti-corruption personnel for all domestic matches.

Sportradar, an international betting-monitoring service, discovered suspicious activity in 903 matches in 10 different sports worldwide in 76 countries last year.

It is the highest number of suspicious matches on record in their 17-year history, but it remains a largely men’s sports area.

“Sportradar has detected six suspicious women’s competitions worldwide in 2021,” said a director of Sportradar.

“This is in line with recent trends and while suspicious matches have been detected in several women’s sports, match fixing for betting purposes is overwhelmingly detected in men’s sports.

“Until now, we have never discovered a suspicious match in women’s cricket.

“Betting coverage and interest in women’s sports continues to grow all the time, so this is something that we will continue to monitor closely.”

Source: 12 March 2022, EXBulletin

Cricket

<https://www.esports.net/news/team-orca-ban-pnxbet-invitationals-sea-season-4/>



EGBA

EGBA establishes new expert group to counter cyber security threats

Brussels, Today – The European Gaming and Betting Association (EGBA) has established a new expert group to help support and coordinate the efforts of its members to counter the latest cyber security threats against gambling websites. The group will enable EGBA members to share information with each other about the latest cyber threats and attacks, cooperate to track and resolve incidents, identify and solve security vulnerabilities, and implement the latest best practices in cyber security.

Gambling websites are an increasingly lucrative target for organised and professional cyber criminals who deploy a range of sophisticated methods to try to access player accounts, and steal funds and customer data stored within these. According to cyber security firm Imperva, automated cyber threats[1] accounted for 28% of all global traffic to gambling websites in 2020. Cyber threats are a particular problem during major sporting events and increased 96% year-on-year during the European football championships in 2021, with UK and German gambling websites particularly targeted. In 2019, EGBA members prevented at least 550 major cyber-attacks against their European websites.

The group will facilitate cooperation between EGBA members to support their active, early detection and responses to cyber threats, strengthen individual and common security practices, and prevent malicious activities against their customer bases, including protecting against theft of funds and data breaches. The group comprises cyber security experts from EGBA members and the scope and type of data to be shared in the group has been established through a Memorandum of Understanding.

Participation to the group is open to gambling operators which are not members of EGBA, provided they comply with a number of principles to ensure the highest standards in cyber security and data protection are maintained.

“We have launched this expert group to encourage and establish a much-needed platform for cross-industry cooperation on cybersecurity issues. Cyber criminals are increasingly determined and sophisticated in their efforts to try to hack into gambling websites to steal customer data and money. Cyber threats tend to be cross-border in nature, affect operators in the same ways, and are a common threat to the industry. That’s why it is crucially important that operators work closer together to strengthen cyber security protocols and procedures, find common solutions to the latest threats and security vulnerabilities, and implement the highest security standards.” – Maarten Haijer, Secretary General, European Gaming and Betting Association (EGBA).

Examples of cyber threats to online gambling websites

Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDos) Attack: DDos attacks make a website or app slow down or become unresponsive by flooding it with artificial website traffic and are problematic for gambling websites because website speed and performance are crucial to the real-time nature of sports betting.[2] Website latency or outage can result in loss of revenue, poor customer experience, brand damage, and loss of customers to competitors.

Account takeover (ATO): Bad bots mimic legitimate login activity to gain access – through credential stuffing and cracking – to player accounts. This type of attack can be lucrative because funds and financial information, such as bank card details, are stored in player accounts. Like with many other sectors, ATO is the biggest cyber threat to the gambling sector and can lead to the theft of a player’s money and private data.

Odds / price scraping: This is a specific issue for gambling websites. By using bad bots to scrape betting odds from multiple gambling websites, cyber criminals can obtain valuable insights which help them to predict betting results more accurately and to decide on which websites they should place their bets, to maximise profits. Operators may also use price scraping against their competitors and use the insight to advance their own market position.

Promotion abuse: This happens when bad bots are deployed by cyber criminals to perform large-scale account creations in order to abuse a special promotion, e.g. a free bet promotion for new customers on the World Cup 2022 tournament, and then capitalize unfairly on the promotion.

Credit Card Fraud: Cyber criminals also try to access player accounts to test credit cards numbers to identify missing data (exp. date, CVV, etc). This damages the fraud score of the gambling operator and increases customer service costs to process fraudulent chargebacks.

Source: 23 March 2022, European Gaming & Betting Association

Italy

L'impegno per contrastare i tentativi di infiltrazione nel mondo sportivo

Sono 5 le segnalazioni di scommesse anomale per la stagione sportiva in corso giunte sino ad oggi al Gruppo investigativo scommesse sportive (GISS), organismo istituito presso la direzione centrale della Polizia Criminale e composto da rappresentanti di Forze di polizia e DIA con l'obiettivo di approfondire le segnalazioni e dare impulso alle attività investigative.

Le segnalazioni hanno riguardato eventi disputati all'estero (1 per il calcio, 3 per il tennis e 1 per il tennis tavolo). Mentre nel corso della scorsa stagione sportiva (2020-2021), il GISS ha ricevuto 26 segnalazioni (di cui 18 hanno riguardato eventi disputati all'estero). In particolare, 12 hanno riguardato il calcio (7 calcio estero, 4 campionato Lega Pro e 1 campionato Primavera).

I dati sul fenomeno sono disponibili nel dossier, elaborato dal Servizio Analisi Criminale, pubblicato sul sito del Viminale, www.interno.gov.it, nell'apposita sezione "Il crimine in Italia" disponibile in home page.

Il Gruppo, coordinato dal direttore del Servizio Analisi Criminale, ha compiti di impulso e raccordo delle attività di contrasto dei tentativi di infiltrazione nel mondo sportivo anche della criminalità organizzata.

Il GISS si avvale delle informazioni raccolte dall'Unità informativa scommesse sportive (UISS) istituita presso il dipartimento della Pubblica Sicurezza al fine di garantire la regolarità dello svolgimento delle manifestazioni sportive e ippiche e contrastare i tentativi di infiltrazione della criminalità. L'organismo è presieduto dal vice direttore generale della Pubblica Sicurezza-direttore centrale della Polizia Criminale ed è composto dai rappresentanti dei comandi generali dell'Arma dei Carabinieri e della Guardia di Finanza nonché da rappresentanti della Polizia di Stato, dell'Ufficio dello Sport della Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, dell'Agenzia delle Dogane e del mondo dello sport (Coni, Figc). I compiti dell'UISS sono: analizzare le notizie pervenute dagli organismi preposti all'organizzazione, alla gestione e alle attività di controllo (comprese quelle concernenti la prevenzione di episodi di violenza) delle manifestazioni sportive, oltre a proporre strategie di prevenzione e contrasto e favorire le iniziative finalizzate all'incremento della cooperazione internazionale di polizia nel settore.

Il monitoraggio in tempo reale dei dati di gioco e l'implementazione di sofisticati strumenti tecnologici di controllo, in grado di effettuare verifiche lungo il ciclo di vita di ogni scommessa, hanno consentito, negli ultimi anni, di contrastare sempre più efficacemente il fenomeno del match fixing.

Un impegno di etica e responsabilità per tutelare i valori dello sport.

Source: 21 March 2022, Department of Public Security of Italy

<https://www.interno.gov.it/it/notizie/limpegno-contrastare-i-tentativi-infiltrazione-nel-mondo-sportivo>



United States

As sports leagues embrace gambling profits, Calvin Ridley's suspension resurfaces issues

In November, Calvin Ridley violated a sacrosanct rule of professional sports with an ease that would have been unimaginable just a decade ago. With a few taps of his smartphone while in Florida, away from his team, the Atlanta Falcons wide receiver placed a series of bets, which the NFL later detected and punished him for this week with an indefinite suspension.

Since the Black Sox scandal of 1919 nearly destroyed professional baseball, sports leagues have guarded against threats posed by gambling to the integrity of outcomes with existential zeal. That aim has remained even as sports leagues have accepted gobs of sponsorship and advertising money from sportsbooks since the Supreme Court effectively overturned the federal prohibition on sports gambling in 2018.

Ridley's wagers and subsequent suspension raised issues that existed before the federal ban on sports betting fell. But those concerns have been heightened by the widespread legalization and sports leagues' total embrace of it.

Archive: How the NFL embraced gambling after years of fighting it

For some, Ridley's bets — three parlays that he says totaled \$1,500 — proved that the NFL will be challenged to have it both ways, to both profit from sports gambling and maintain credibility in fans' eyes. For those in the industry, the episode provided a symbol of a functioning system; Ridley set off alarms that may not have been detected had he placed bets illegally. A sophisticated digital dragnet caught him and allowed the NFL to levy a hefty punishment, keeping him out of games for at least the 2022 season and perhaps longer.

"I don't think there is any damage done," said Becky Harris, a professor at UNLV's International Gaming Institute who formerly served as chair of the Nevada Gaming Control Board. "I think it reinforces that the right types of policies are in place. If you look at the rosters and calculate how many athletes are on those teams times their athletic staff, times coaching, times the owner and all of their families, that's a really big number. And we caught one of those individuals in that ecosystem out of a really, really big number of people who could potentially sports bet with inside information. It shows that the system is working."

Former MLB commissioner Fay Vincent, a high-ranking MLB official when the sport gave Pete Rose a lifetime ban for gambling, sees only disorder in the sports betting landscape. He wondered how Ridley could have been caught had he simply made bets through an intermediary outside his immediate family. Banning Rose was relatively straightforward because he committed an illegal act baseball had clearly distanced itself from — MLB at one point prohibited signage advertising the lottery, Vincent said.

The lack of federal prohibition combined with the NFL's gambling partnerships, in Vincent's view, could leave a sports league vulnerable to legal appeals from players who violate league rules, even if those rules are clearly stated and collectively bargained.

"The idea the NFL can throw some kid out for a year for betting on a football game when there's no federal policy in that area, I think it's a total mess," Vincent said.

Spotting irregularities

On a global scale, match-fixing is a bigger problem than ever. Sports data and integrity services corporation Sportradar recently released an annual study that found 903 suspicious matches — the vast majority in low-level competition — across 10 sports and 76 countries, the highest number in the 17-year history of the study. It estimated the match-fixing generated \$165 million in profit.

"The allure of vast, ill-gained betting profits is one that keeps match-fixing syndicates running and is why stakeholders across the global sporting ecosystem need to work together in the anti-match-fixing fight," the study read.

Boswell: If legalized betting is the future, our sports are in trouble

Companies such as Genius Sports and Sportradar, which formerly worked with the NFL and is still in business with MLB, the NHL, the NBA and other leagues, monitor betting patterns and search for inconsistencies. They have technology that can spot unusual patterns, and then a human analyst determines whether they can be explained — a changed forecast or reported injury, for example — or whether the league needs to be alerted, said Andy Cunningham, the director of global partnerships for Sportradar's Integrity Services.

The technology can help spot two of the three major potential threats: match-fixing and the illicit sharing of insider information. Ridley fell into the third problem area — league personnel not necessarily engaging in flat-out corruption but still breaking the rules.

"That's where you really need the information from the sportsbook directly," Cunningham said.

The NFL caught Ridley gambling on his Falcons when the Hard Rock sportsbook in Florida noticed he had bet and alerted Genius Sports, the data and integrity company the NFL partnered with to monitor suspicious activity. Under state regulations, Harris said, sportsbooks are liable to report any bets that can reasonably be detected as suspicious.

There are, of course, potential holes. Had Ridley asked a close associate outside his immediate family to place a bet for him, he may not have been caught. But the technology in place to stop even that is powerful. The prevalence of online wagering has created an “audit trail,” Cunningham said, which makes it easier to track possible breaches and to revisit cases that only appear suspicious after the fact. The technology exists for sports leagues to hand over a database of everyone covered by their rules — players, staffers, family members, etc. — to a sportsbook so it can monitor those accounts or even block them from betting on a given sport. Cunningham said some leagues have discussed implementing that.

“Obviously, you can’t cover up every single eventuality,” Cunningham said. “But that’s the power of the system. We might see if someone got particularly greedy and started placing more sums. An individual sportsbook would have steps to link accounts. With today’s technology, there’s a lot that can be done.”

Educating athletes

The desired outcome for sports leagues, of course, is that no personnel place bets in the first place. The prohibition on betting on your league has been Rule No. 1 in sports for more than a century. As laws and mainstream attitudes around gambling have relaxed and the availability and ease of placing a bet has skyrocketed, educating players has become more necessary than ever.

Signs in NBA locker rooms and MLB clubhouses prominently display the leagues’ ban on players and personnel wagering on games. Harris credited the NFL for bringing in Josh Shaw, a cornerback who was suspended for 21 games in 2019 for betting against his own team while on injured reserve, to talk with players about the pitfalls of gambling on the NFL.

“Player education is key and the messaging — don’t bet on your sport — needs to be constant,” International Betting Integrity Association chief executive Khalid Ali said in an email. “Players need to not only know the rules but be made aware of the consequences of not following them. If there is one positive from this case, it is that this will have made a lot of players in all sports aware of the dangers to their career.”

The biggest threat, experts said, comes at the college level. The sheer number of college athletes enhances the likelihood one of them could bet on their own game, feed unauthorized information to bettors or unduly influence an outcome. Unlike their professional counterparts, they also lack the financial incentive not to jeopardize the integrity of their games.

“Our most at-risk athletes are those college athletes that are good enough to play in college but not good enough to play professionally,” said Harris. “What’s preventing them other than a strong moral code from engaging in match-fixing?”

In that case, Harris said, the NCAA’s best defense is the relationship it has forged with sportsbooks and regulators. They can spot irregular betting patterns and share that information with the NCAA, which could then investigate.

The NCAA recently partnered with EPIC Risk Management, a gambling harm prevention company, to provide “a comprehensive gambling harm and student-athlete protection educational program,” NCAA spokeswoman Saquandra Heath said. The program will not be available on campuses, though, until later this year.

“The potential issues for U.S. sports are no different in the age of widespread legal betting than it was when it was prohibited,” Ali said. “Now, the U.S. sports work with reputable betting companies to highlight potential risks and put in place mitigating measures. The reality is no one knows what went on under prohibition; it was a head-in-sand mentality that masked potential issues rather than addressed them. It is out in the open now, and [while] there will unfortunately be some cases like Ridley, we will be able to identify them and take measures to address that.”

Murky relationships

NFL critics labeled the suspension of Ridley as hypocritical given its ties to sports wagering. Last summer, the NFL reached agreements with seven sports betting companies as approved league partners, and the league capped advertisements for sportsbooks at six per game. The NFL is far from alone. The NFL is far from alone. MLB, the NHL and the NBA have official partners, too, and individual teams in all leagues have their own sponsorship arrangements with betting companies. Inside Capital One Arena in Washington, home of the Wizards and Capitals, William Hill operates a sportsbook. Other teams intend to follow the model.

The NFL’s partnerships with betting companies place new attention on potential conflicts between gambling and players, coaches and staffers. One curious and seemingly unchecked example is the work of Warren Sharp, an analyst who owns and operates the Sharp Football Analysis, which sells advanced data, information and betting picks to clients. A postseason package this year cost \$374.99, according to the website.

Sharp also does consulting work for a handful of NFL coaches, going so far as to suggest specific personnel packages and play calls. In a February article in the New Yorker, one unidentified coach confirmed he had used a play Sharp suggested for a touchdown and that he talks to Sharp “at least once a week.”

The two sides of his business raise obvious questions. Is he gleaning inside information from NFL coaches and passing it on for profit? Could coaches share privileged information — which is then passed to bettors — in exchange for Sharp’s insights? Does the NFL allow coaches to consult with gambling touts?

NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy did not respond to multiple emails. Reached for comment this week, Sharp referred a reporter to his agent, Matt Olson of CAA. Olson did not reply to multiple emails.

For players at least, Ridley’s suspension provides the clearest lesson possible. If they bet on games, they could lose far more than a wager.

“It’s being reported that Ridley’s \$1,500 in bets will cost him \$11 million in salary,” Ali said. “That’s a pretty strong message in itself.”

Source: 11 March 2022, The Washington Post

Football

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2022/03/11/calvin-ridley-sports-leagues-gambling/>

