

CONTENTS

- 01 Editorial by Maarten Haijer, Secretary General, EGBA
- 01-02 Time for Europe to act against match-fixing, by Bogdan Wenta, Member of the European Parliament
- 03-04 Athletes are at the frontline in the battle against match-fixing, by Paulina Tomczyk, Secretary General, EU Athletes



The fight against match-fixing

Editorial



With the 2018 World Cup just around the corner, public attention over the next few weeks will be focused on the football in Russia. Global sporting events of this kind capture the global public imagination and are extremely popular but they also provide a good moment to consider and showcase what sports stakeholders are doing to prevent corruption in sports, and in particular match-fixing. From sports governing bodies to athletes, everyone must do their bit to keep sports clean and fair and to ensure that citizens and sports fans can continue to have confidence in sports.

In this EGBA news, we are honoured to have **MEP Bogdan Wenta**, the Polish MEP and former international handball player, sharing his views on what needs to be done and what is needed to keep corruption out of sport. MEP Wenta stresses, in particular, the importance of further cooperation by EU Member State authorities to exchange information and best practice.

Clearly, athletes themselves play a crucial role in the fight against match-fixing. After all, they are at the heart of our sports, without the athletes there is no heroism - but they also are the gatekeepers to ensuring sports stay clean. **Paulina Tomczyk**, Secretary General of **EU Athletes**, the European association of Athletes, explains how player unions have been a pioneer in educating athletes about the risk of match-fixing, focussing especially on the younger athletes, through the support of the European sports betting sector and the European Commission.

Maarten Haijer,
Secretary General, EGBA

Time for Europe to act against match-fixing

Bogdan Wenta, Member of the European Parliament, member of the Culture and Education Committee and Vice-Chair of the Parliament's Sports Intergroup, talks of his priority to fight match-fixing.

As a former handball player, coach and manager, I am especially aware of the importance of fair play, both during the game and in sports administration. The cheating and manipulation of sporting events demoralises athletes and disappoints audiences. This is why we need proper regulations to ensure integrity and good governance in sport. When I became Member of the European Parliament in 2014, I was determined to use this platform to support the fight against all corruption in sports, including match-fixing.

Corruption in sports has many different faces, including doping, money laundering, as well as betting and non-betting related match-fixing. With the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia right around the corner, football has captured the public imagination. So it is important that the public can put their trust in sports and their outcomes. The problem of match-fixing is not limited to one sport alone – but in some it is more prevalent. ESSA¹ – the sports betting integrity body – recently pointed out



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Bogdan Wenta, Member of the European Parliament, and member of the Culture and Education Committee

that the majority of suspicious bets identified in 2017 were for football and tennis: together making up 77 percent of suspicious betting alerts.



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Time for Europe to act against match-fixing (Cont from the page 1)

As legislators, we need to put policy instruments in place that will prevent, detect and fight against the cross-border problem of match-fixing. Education is an important element to this and the EU has been instrumental in providing funding opportunities to educate all relevant stakeholders against the risk of sport manipulations, through a series of Erasmus+ projects.

In February 2017, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on an integrated approach to sport policy where it called on international, European and national sports organisations to commit to good governance practices and promote integrity in order to eradicate all forms of corruption. It also urged the European Commission to prepare proposals to enhance good governance standards for sports organisations, sports governing bodies and their member associations, as well as monitor their implementation.

The European Parliament also called on EU Member States to establish match-fixing as a criminal offence punishable by law and stressed that fighting this issue requires international law enforcement cooperation. Finally, it urged the Council of the EU to find a solution which would enable the EU and its Member States to sign and ratify the Council of Europe Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions - the so-called Macolin Convention - with a view to enabling its complete implementation.

“The problem of match-fixing is not limited to one sport alone – but in some it is more prevalent. ESSA – the sports betting integrity body – recently pointed out that the majority of suspicious bets it identified in 2017 were for football and tennis: together making up 77 percent of suspicious betting alerts”

Adopted by Council of Europe members in 2014, the Macolin Convention is crucial for ensuring that sports organisations, law enforcement authorities, sports betting companies and regulators can collaborate as effectively as possible to counter match-fixing.

In September 2017, the European Parliament entrusted me to prepare the legal basis for the ratification of the Convention by the EU and its Member States. The negotiations are still ongoing and I fully encourage all Member States to ratify the Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions as soon as possible. My priority now is to boost the political momentum in favour of the Macolin Convention.

At the same time, some of the steps already undertaken by the Group of Copenhagen, which

was established by the Council of Europe in 2016, are very encouraging. The Group is a network of countries and acts as a platform for facilitating exchanges of information concerning potential sports manipulations between countries and enables them to co-operate more efficiently with law enforcement authorities such as Europol and Interpol. The Group’s “Alert and Surveillance System” is regularly used to monitor a range of major international events, including mostly recently the 23rd Winter Olympic Games in February 2018.

I look forward to hearing more about the progress made by the Group later this year at the 3rd International Conference on the fight against the manipulation of sports competitions taking place in Strasbourg between 24 and 25 September 2018. I am also grateful to the initiators of the project “Keep Crime out of Sports” which, from 2016 to 2017, had the double advantage of promoting the worldwide ratification of the Macolin Convention and providing technical assistance to countries in the implementation of the Convention principles.

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I look forward to seeing that initiative developed further through the KCOOS+ project which the Council of Europe will be implementing until 2020. I hope all these initiatives will bring us closer to putting an end to the problem of match-fixing! ■



¹ www.eu-ssa.org

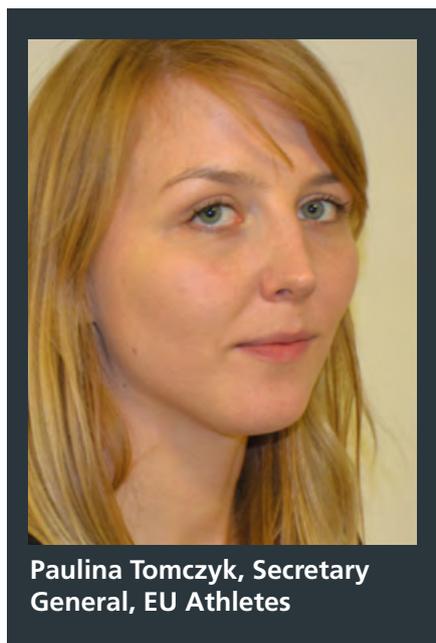
Athletes are at the frontline in the battle against match-fixing

In the past years, the fight against match-fixing has rightfully become a priority of European institutions, Member States, sport organizations and other stakeholders. Player unions and athletes associations are at the front line of this battle: after all, the athletes are the ones with the most to lose if public confidence in the sport they love - and earn a living from - is destroyed as a result of corruption.

As a part of its work on match-fixing, EU Athletes - the federation of European players association and athlete unions – has been engaged since 2010 in partnership with betting operators, represented by EGBA, ESSA and RGA, in the PROtect Integrity project. The objective of PROtect Integrity is to educate professional and elite-level athletes - from different sports across Europe - on match-fixing and sport betting integrity.

The “2016 PROtect Integrity” Erasmus+ project was concluded in

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Paulina Tomczyk, Secretary General, EU Athletes

December 2017 and reached over 15,000 professional and elite-level athletes, from 22 player associations in 13 different countries, through face-to-face education sessions. This direct educational outreach has been amplified through a dedicated website, supporting materials and resources and through a social media campaign, which included video messages from top athletes, aiming to raise awareness at grassroots-level. A lot of conferences were also held and included speakers and guests representing many relevant and important stakeholders, such as Interpol (who provided a “Train the Trainer” course to the players representatives), Europol, European Commission, Council of Europe, FIFPro and National Platforms representatives.

Additionally, seminars covering specific issues, such as social media and communication, problem gambling, cooperation with National Platforms, were also organised.

Research into the effectiveness of the programme was conducted based on questionnaires received from over 1500 athletes. The results showed particularly that:

- The knowledge about match fixing

“ 27% of the athletes surveyed had not previously received any match-fixing education whilst 42% had received education several times in the past. ”

varied significantly: 27% of the athletes surveyed had not previously received any match-fixing education whilst 42% had received education several times in the past.

- The player association-led education model was well received by the players. More than 80% of athletes surveyed found it “very” or “extremely” useful.
- 2.3% of players surveyed had received suspicious approaches regarding match-fixing or betting. 0.8% of athletes reported that they had felt pressured to underperform by their clubs. It may be that having active player associations, with their focus on athlete welfare and rights, plays a role in reducing a sport’s susceptibility to match-fixers.
- 82.7% of responses included the player association in their list of those they would trust to report suspicious activity and 35.1% would trust only the player association.

Following from the success of the project and the conclusions of the research, EU Athletes launched a new Erasmus+ project “PROtect Integrity Plus” at the beginning of 2018. Working together with EGBA, ESSA

and RGA, and 9 other partners, the project aims to adapt and implement the “Red Button” reporting app which is a mobile app available which allows athletes to report suspicious activity. The app is available in 7 countries (Denmark, France, Greece, Italy,

Ireland, Spain, UK) and in 5 different sports (basketball, handball, futsal, volleyball, rugby).

The app was initially developed by the Finish Football Players Association (JPY) and

PROtect Integrity Plus extends its reach beyond football, initially targeting over 3000 athletes, making sure that players can report anything suspicious in a secure matter.



Athletes are at the frontline in the battle against match-fixing (Cont from the page 3)

FIFPro, who are also actively involved in the project, and it has already been introduced to footballers in several European countries. PROtect Integrity Plus, however, extends its reach beyond football and has initially targeting over 3000 athletes – across various sporting disciplines - with the ultimate aim to create a player association-led, European-wide reporting system, making sure that all the players have a tool they can trust to report anything suspicious in a secure matter.

“Working together with EGBA, ESSA and RGA, and 9 partners, EU Athletes coordinate now a project aiming to adapt and implement the Red Button reporting app available to report anything suspicious in 7 countries (Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Spain, UK) and 5 different sports (basketball, handball, futsal, volleyball, rugby).”

The project demonstrates the instrumental and leading role of player associations in the fight against match-fixing, but also the essential need for involvement and coordination with other key stakeholders. Besides the benefit of collaboration with the betting industry, the cooperation with the National

Platforms, the Group of Copenhagen and the Council of Europe is particularly relevant. This is because well-established, operational and efficient National Platforms are best placed to deal with the reports related to match-fixing, such as the ones coming from the Red Button app.

The Red Button app will be rolled out further during the summer of 2018 and the project will continue to run until December 2019. It is yet another staging post in the efforts to protect the integrity of sport which, as the experiences and statistics show, need to be continued and strengthened. For this reason, EU Athletes will keep working proactively to find possibilities to extend the programme to more countries and sports and contribute to the global fight against match-fixing. ■

About EU Athletes

- **EU Athletes** is a federation of European player unions and athlete association representing more than 30 national associations and over 25.000 individual athletes across the continent and across sport disciplines.
- **EU Athletes** was founded in 2007 and has since taken a steep journey as an advocate for the athletes’ voice on various issues such as anti doping, match fixing and education on the risks of sports betting, dual careers or good governance.
- **EU Athletes** is an accepted stakeholder in the sport sector at the European Union, Member of the EPAS Consultative Committee and member of the various expert groups of the European Commission.
- **EU Athletes** is also integrated into the wider labour movement as a member the World Players Association, the

