



NEARLY 20% OF PEOPLE IN SPORTS CONFRONTED WITH (IN)DIRECT MATCH-FIXING PROPOSALS

A large-scale European study shows that nearly 20% of people in sports have been confronted with match-fixing – the manipulation of sport competitions or matches – proposals. The Erasmus+ sport project “Evidence-based Prevention Of Sporting-related Match-fixing” (EPOS M), coordinated by Ghent University, examined match-fixing in seven European countries. More than 5,000 people related to sports participated in an online survey that focused on current and former athletes, coaches, board members, referees, and others involved in several sport disciplines (including football, tennis, basketball, hockey, handball, and cricket).

Large-scale international study on match-fixing

It is well known that match-fixing is a globally spread and harmful phenomenon in the world of sport. “With the EPOS M project, we try to examine the different types of match-fixing, in various sport disciplines and countries (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom) in order to raise awareness about match-fixing and to stimulate its prevention”, says EPOS M project manager Stef Van Der Hoeven.

The first study results show that almost 20 percent of the participants reported (in)direct match-fixing proposals. More specifically, 17.5 percent of the participants indicated that they personally knew at least one person who had been solicited to “fix” a match. Additionally, 8.4 percent of the participants revealed that they had already been solicited themselves for a match-fixing proposal. “However, a clear distinction should be made between the different types of match-fixing”, clarifies Van Der Hoeven.

Betting-related vs. sporting-related match-fixing

On the one hand, there is the betting-related type of match-fixing, in which matches or specific events during matches are manipulated to earn money by betting on the manipulated match. Only 9.8 percent of the participants who had already been solicited for match-fixing indicated that the proposal was made solely for the purpose of making money by betting on the manipulated match during the last (or only) time they were approached. In most cases, they were offered money and sometimes other material inducements to accept the proposal. Almost 40 percent of them were also threatened or pressured to fix a match. Eventually, 35.9 percent indicated that they consented to the betting-related proposal, mainly because of the money and/or other material inducements offered, or because they experienced financial difficulties at that time.

On the other hand, there is match-fixing for sporting purposes, often referred to as “sporting-related match-fixing”. Almost 70 percent of the approached participants indicated that, during the last or only time they were approached, the proposal had a sporting-related purpose only. These persons were mainly approached to prevent the relegation of a specific club or player or to enable



a specific club or player to win a championship. With this type of match-fixing, the outcome of the match (who wins/loses) was at stake in more than 80 percent of the cases. In about 50 percent of the cases, a deliberate underperformance was expected and money was offered, frequently supplemented by other material inducement (ranging from beer to (luxury) gifts such as a trip or even a car). Almost 20 percent of those who received a sporting-related match-fixing proposal were also threatened or pressured. Eventually, 27.4 percent consented to the sporting-related match-fixing proposal. Consenting to the sporting-related match-fixing proposal was mainly seen as a friendly gesture towards another club or athlete. In other cases, people consented because of the money and/or other material inducements offered, or because they were pressured by their own team.

Prevention of sporting-related match-fixing

Despite the clear threat of sporting-related match-fixing, this type of match-fixing is often underestimated and therefore neglected in prevention initiatives. “In a second phase, the EPOSM project will try to fill this gap by elaborating action plans and workshops on the prevention of match-fixing in general and sporting-related match-fixing in particular”, adds Van Der Hoeven. Furthermore, the EPOSM study also shows that 48 percent of the people who reported (in)direct match-fixing proposals had never reported their suspicions or experiences to anyone. The people who had reported their suspicions or experiences of match-fixing to someone mainly did so to teammates, coaches, or board members of their sport club. In a very limited number of cases, reports were made to an anonymous reporting line or to the police. This may indicate that reporting channels are insufficiently known and/or that people are often afraid to report their suspicions or experiences of match-fixing to anyone. “In addition to awareness-raising initiatives, suitable reporting channels and whistleblowing protection programs are also important in the prevention of match-fixing”, concludes Van Der Hoeven.

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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

