

Does governance of friendly club football matches matter?



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Should we be worried about friendlies?



“Friendly matches, often international, are particularly vulnerable as they are less regulated than FIFA-sanctioned competitions ... friendlies are vulnerable to match-fixers controlling every aspect of the match – from the venue selection to match officials.”

‘Match-fixing in Football – Training Needs Assessment 2013’.
Interpol report (2013), p15-16

The not-so-friendly friendlies

FC Jerv involved in possible match-fixing

FC Jerv involved in a possible match-fixing scandal The Norwegian Football Club, Jerv, won 1-0 over Latvian Ventpsils in a pre-season match at Marbella, Spain....

Match-fixing claims about Dutch club friendlies in Spain

Stuttgart friendly against KF Laci shows up irregular betting patterns

- 'There is no suspicion against Stuttgart' says league
- Germans beat Albanians 5-0 in game played in Portugal

FAI open alleged match-fixing investigation surrounding Bray Wanderers friendly

CYPRUS, ROMANIA The Cypriot Deception

Referees reveal how they fix off-season football matches in Cyprus

And more

In the summer of 2016, Austrian federal police raided a hotel in Zillertal occupied by players from Albanian club Teuta Durres on a summer training club.

The police are understood to have suspected the club was offered a cheap or free trip in return for fixing the results of matches against Austrian clubs, who were not under any suspicion.

Insufficient evidence was found to bring a prosecution.

When Albanian club Skenderbeu were banned from UEFA competition in 2018 for a decade, friendlies were among the 53 matches allegedly manipulated

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A month before the start of the 2018 World Cup, Ukrainian police raided 35 football clubs in an operation against suspected match-fixing.

20 of the 100 matches under suspicion were friendly games.

Suspicious Betting Trends in Global Football

2018

0.73% of all games
analysed classified as
suspicious

1.2% of all friendlies
analysed as suspicious

“Eight international and 12 club matches accounted for the 20 suspicious friendly matches identified in this year’s report.

“Six of the suspicious matches were played at neutral venues not in the home country of either team.

“Six of the 12 suspicious club friendly matches took place in January, and featured teams on mid-season breaks.”

Why is this happening?



- Who assigns referees for friendly games? The national association or the match promoter?
- Who keeps a record of when overseas clubs come to play a friendly?
- Games involving clubs from two different countries and staged in a third should be run by a FIFA accredited match agent, but who checks?

“The governance of friendly matches is unclear where two teams from different countries play each other in a third country.

“Bets on these matches can be made from other countries, providing further challenges to investigations and jurisdictional responsibility.”

Suspicious Betting Trends in Global
Football

The result?

- Gambling on fixed games is often on Asian markets, which are harder to monitor
- Fixing a low-key friendly played out of season and overseas means clubs stay 'clean' in their own league

Concerns over friendlies in Cyprus are so great that in 2017 data monitoring company RunningBall stopped coverage of these games



Why do bookmakers offer these games?



During gaps in the regular playing season, particularly in Europe, these games are important fillers



Punters who only bet on football and want to fill up an accumulator/exacta/perfecta bet will include these friendlies due to lack of alternatives



European friendlies have more credibility with Asian gamblers than leagues matches from their countries



Once one bookmaker has offered a friendly, others will always follow for fear of missing out on customers

So who suffers?

- Players
- Coaches
- Match officials
- The betting industry
- And the credibility of the game



Solutions?



- **DON'T BET ON CLUB FRIENDLIES??**
- **NATIONAL GOVERNING BODIES SHOULD KEEP A REGISTER OF ALL FRIENDLIES PLAYED BY SENIOR CLUBS IN THEIR COUNTRY INCLUDING DETAILS OF PLAYERS, COACHES, OFFICIALS AND MATCH PROMOTERS**
- **LICENCES OF MATCH PROMOTERS SHOULD BE CHECKED**
- **FEDERATIONS TO CHARGE A MINIMUM REGISTRATION FEE FOR REGULATING THESE GAMES**

Further reading

- Combating Match-Fixing in Club Football Non-Competitive Matches
<https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplu-project-details/#project/603138-EPP-1-2018-1-CY-SPO-SCP>



**Combating Match Fixing
in Club Football
Non-Competitive Matches**

- ‘Game on: the commercialisation and corruption of the preseason friendly’ – Soccer & Society, Vol 19, 2018 Issue 2
- ‘A Friendly Business? A critical evaluation of the globalisation and commercialisation of the preseason friendly (CIES 2019).