



Combating Match Fixing in Club Football Non-Competitive Matches

PRESS RELEASE

Embargoed until 9:00AM GMT Wednesday December 1, 2021

Lack of governance of football friendly (non-competitive) matches exploited by match-fixers

Football friendly matches are wide open for match-fixing due to a lack of regulation according to new research, with more than 250 friendlies involving European clubs showing signs of suspicious activity during 2016-20. The results come from a three-year study funded by the European Commission's Erasmus+ programme and led by the University of Nicosia Research Foundation.

A survey of 700 players in Cyprus, Greece and Malta conducted by the project also found that:

- More than a quarter of players (26.5%) had played in a club friendly they suspected had been manipulated.
- More than a quarter (26.3%) of approaches to fix a friendly match were made by club officials and 15% by other players.
- Club officials were the instigators in 19% of approaches to manipulate friendlies and were the main beneficiaries in 26.3% of approaches.

The research study found that national football federations and other involved stakeholders have been slow to establish where responsibility lies for friendlies, particularly when clubs from different countries are involved in non-competitive matches played in a third country. Some European football federations do not track where clubs go on pre-season and mid-winter tours.

This lack of sporting governance and regulation, combined with the availability of these games on betting markets around the world, notably with poorly or unregulated betting operators in jurisdictions such as Curaçao and the Philippines, who may themselves have links to criminality, leaves these games at greater risk of potential exploitation by match-fixers.

To address this, the report, Combating Match Fixing in Club Football Non-Competitive Friendlies, proposes:

- That UEFA enforces regulation of friendlies on all 55 member associations

- That Match agents are barred from owning or controlling clubs, just as players agents are
- The formation of a body to represent match agents in future negotiations with international bodies such as FIFA and UEFA on regulation
- Establishing data standards that prevent the sale of live match data to poorly and unregulated betting operators

Unlike competitive matches, which are usually covered by agreements between data companies and competition organisers, friendlies are a free-for-all.

Data from these games is being collected and sold to poorly and unregulated betting operators, which do not report signs of suspicious activity, which is often a licensing requirement for well-regulated operators. This sporting event data collation and sale for betting does not currently fall within the scope of regulation, leaving a potential 'blind spot' in terms of market and consumer protection.

Lead investigator, Professor Nicos Kartakoullis, President of the Council, University of Nicosia, comments:

“The combination of a lack of regulation, oversight and information makes these matches easier to manipulate than competitive matches.

“This research shows that in terms of governance, friendly matches need to be considered just like competitive matches.

“With the data for 4,000 friendly matches being offered for betting purposes around the world each year, it is also vital that the betting companies receiving that data are operating from well-regulated jurisdictions and report suspicious betting to protect the integrity of those events.”

The research was led by the University of Nicosia Research Foundation and included the International Betting Integrity Association, EU Athletes, CIES and the football players unions of Cyprus, Greece and Malta as project partners.

NOTE: The report is being launched at a Preventing Match-Fixing Conference in Amsterdam on December 1, which is being staged jointly with international players union FIFPRO. For further details about the Erasmus project, please visit: <https://www.unrf.ac.cy/projects-item/combating/> or contact: steve.menary@btinternet.com

Project: 603138-EPP-1-2018-1-CY-SPO-SCP



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

