

The phenomenon of corruption in sports on the example of soccer games in Poland

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Abstract

Background & Study Aim:

The phenomenon of corruption in sports is linked to profits on the huge social interest in maximizing sports performance and identifying with sports clubs. At the forefront of the escalation of corruption in sports is soccer, as the most popular sport in the world. The purpose of this article there are examples of corruption in football.

Material & Methods:

Media reports on corruption in Polish soccer were analysed. The text refers to three cases of corruption in which charges were proven and court cases resulted in convictions.

Results:

It was found that in the cases analysed, the corruption procedure in Polish soccer affected the sports community as a whole. Involved were players, referees, activists, fans and external companies.

Conclusions:

Although corruption scandals in Polish soccer have quieted down, it cannot be ruled out that the practice is still going on. In the prevention of corruption in sports, emphasis should be placed on close cooperation between the law authorities and the sports community.

Key words:

business in sports • sports ethics • sports law • team sports games

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Corruption – the abuse of public office for private gain. The level of corruption can vary widely, from minor cases of using influence or favouritism to do or return a favour, to kleptocracy, where even the outward appearance of integrity is abandoned [27].

Sport – competition based on physical and intellectual activity, the purpose of which is to maximize the results of competition. A distinction is made between amateur, competitive, professional sports [28].

Player – *noun* someone taking part in a sport or game [29].

Team sport – *noun* any sport that is played between two or more teams, e.g. football, tennis or hockey [29].

INTRODUCTION

The most popular sport with global reach is soccer. Its social phenomenon has been known for years [1]. And soccer games at every level arouse excitement and interest [2]. A recent media sensation was the awarding of the 2022 World Cup to the football federation from Qatar. The decision of the authorities of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) began to stir controversy, as the candidacy left behind such considered favourites as the United Kingdom and the United States. In addition, the eminently hot climate in Qatar prompted FIFA authorities to postpone the championship tournament to November and December. Suspicions of corruption have been levelled at FIFA from the public. As a result, the topic of corruption in sports has returned to public debate.

Corruption in sports is a socially negative phenomenon, affecting the presence and promotion of dishonest behaviour accompanying the organization of sports competition and participation in it. It should be understood as any illegal, unethical or immoral action, the end result of which is an intentional distortion of the outcome of sports competition, with the perpetrator or perpetrators of this action achieving a material benefit. It is an action that contradicts both the purpose of sports itself and the moral values commonly shared in society and sports as an important element in the development of social activity. This phenomenon consists of an action aimed at lowering the level of sports performance, and is of a group nature.

The most common forms of corruption in sports are, such as: match-fixing related to gambling conducted for financial purposes, the use of information obtained about the possibility of match-fixing for gambling purposes, as well as match-fixing that does not involve gambling, but is undertaken for personal gain. The essence of the act here is pathological, criminal in nature. The “White Paper on Sports” issued by the Commission of the European Communities emphasized that the crime of corruption is one of the main threats to organized sports in the 21st century. Corruption appeared there alongside such other crimes significantly detrimental to the transparency of sports competition as racism, money laundering, doping, violence, or the illegal and unlawful use of underage sports players [3].

On this basis, the following areas of escalation can be distinguished: corruption of players, corruption of sports activists, corruption of referees, corruption of sports association officials, corruption of bookmaking companies. Player corruption involves the involvement of either individual players or entire teams in match-fixing with regard to their skills [4] and physical [5, 6] and mental [7-10] dispositions. In the corruption of sports activists, on the other hand, the sports result appears as a commodity, and activists may use cartel collusion or covert reciprocal contacts to negotiate specific outcomes of sports competition [11]. Corruption of referees, on the other hand, refers to the participation of referees in directly shaping the final outcome of a sports competition, while acting under an agreement with another person guaranteeing the referee a personal or, more often, material benefit [12]. In addition, corruption of sports association officials refers to the rigging of tenders and competitions for the organization of sports events [13-16]. The imposition of rules of sports competition contrary to the spirit of sports and created for the financial benefit of representatives of the authorities, or the issuance of biased decisions by the latter, motivated by the achievement of personal or financial benefits [17]. And in the corruption of bookmaking companies fall the illegal activities of the owners of companies engaged in shaping the offer of betting on sports results, as well as the extra-legal activities of organized criminal groups [18, 19].

The above allows us to conclude that the development of corruption in the sports environment is economic in nature [20], since sports are linked to the business environment by the progressive commercialization of all sports [21]. It should be noted here the individual attitudes of people in the sports environment, based on moral relativism and the desire to improve their material position. The escalation of the problem of corruption in sports is linked strictly to the popularity of sports [22]. This is why the problem is so prominent in the soccer environment [23].

The purpose of this article there are examples of corruption in football.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In this paper, the analysis of the phenomenon is based on media reports on three high-profile

scandals. Charges were proven and court cases resulted in convictions.

An important premise of this analysis is the fact that in the corruption procedure in Poland was also attended by members of the Polish Football Association (PZPN).

RESULTS

Overview of corruption scandals in Polish soccer

Example 1

The last round of the highest Polish league in the 1992/1993 season is referred to in the literature as “the Sunday of Miracles” [24]. The PZPN initially did not intend to deal with accusations of corruption in Polish soccer, but was prompted to look into suspected corruption as a result of a letter sent from the national ministry of physical culture and tourism. In doing so, it is emphasized that the “Sunday of Miracles” was one of the first serious symptoms of interest in the issue of corruption in soccer on the example of the sports community in Poland.

The aforementioned event of June 20, 1993, consisted of the fixing of the results of matches between „Lodz Sports Club” vs. „Olimpia” Poznan played in Lodz and „Wisla” Krakow vs. „Legia” Warsaw played in Krakow in a situation in which „Lodz Sports Club” and „Legia” Warsaw were fighting for the Polish championship together with „Lech” Poznan. In the case of matches won by „Lodz Sport Club” and „Legia” Warsaw, the championship was to be decided by the goal balance, which slightly promoted „Legia” Warsaw before the last round. As expected, both „Lodz Sport Club” and „Legia” Warsaw won their matches high (7:1 and 6 : 0, respectively).

Both games were played in parallel, and for every „Lodz Sport Club” goal, „Legia” Warsaw players answered within a few minutes at most during their match in Krakow. Both the course of the games and the final results prompted the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) to write a letter to the PZPN demanding an explanation for the last round of games. Under pressure from European football authorities, PZPN conducted an investigation, under which the results of the matches played in Lodz and Krakow were cancelled. „Legia” Warsaw was stripped

of the championship title and „Lech” Poznan was awarded it. Clubs from Lodz and Warsaw were also banned from representing Poland in European cups under UEFA's decision.

The PZPN imposed a transfer ban and a fine of half a billion Polish zlotys on all four of the aforementioned clubs. „Wisla” Krakow and „Legia” Warsaw were accused of settling matches by bribery, while the activists of „Olimpia” Poznan, previously relegated from the league, were accused of possible bribery in connection with fielding a reserve squad in a meeting against “Lodz Sporting Club”. The prosecutor's office was involved in the investigation, but ultimately dropped it. The case was revisited in 2004 and 2007, when „Legia” Warsaw's owners filed appeals against the decision depriving the club of the 1993 championship. The PZPN authorities rejected both motions, upholding the decision, although it did not directly lead to the conviction of a single person involved in the corruption from the aforementioned playing season.

Example 2

In 2003, another corruption scandal in Polish soccer was revealed, namely the confirmation of the acceptance of a financial benefit by the players of „Swit” Nowy Dwor Mazowiecki during a bargain to stay in the top division of the competition with „Szcakowianka” Jaworzno in exchange for letting go of the competition on the pitch [25]. The result of buying this match was a rematch score of 3 : 0, giving the club from Jaworzno a bonus to stay. However, PZPN authorities managed to get to the case and confirm the participation of 7 players from Nowy Dwor Mazowiecki, 6 of whom – by decision of PZPN authorities – were additionally disqualified for life. The Jaworzno club, in turn, was accused of giving financial benefits to the aforementioned players, which resulted in relegation to the second league and the awarding of several negative points in the following season. What's more, before the disciplinary court of the PZPN, it was possible to reconstruct the exact course of events and confirm that the Jaworzno club gave the amount of PLN 265,000 to the players of „Swit”. Only the players of either team, however, did not answer to the court of public opinion due to the lack of regulations penalizing corruption in the world of sports at the time. The events referred to as the “barrage affair” spurred the Polish legislature to amend the criminal law and introduce regulations criminalizing the described corruption involving all those involved.

Example 3

In 2005, the largest corruption scandal in the history of domestic soccer was uncovered, the investigation of which continued for the next several years and led to the indictment and conviction of more than 600 people involved in the corruption arrangements. As a result of the use of police provocation in 2005, it was possible to detain and bring corruption charges against one referee of Poland's top competition class, as well as an assistant referee from the Lower Silesian structure of the PZPN, acting as accomplices. Both accepted a total of PLN 100,000 in bribes for fixing the results of various matches [26].

A police investigation was launched, with the support of PZPN authorities, which showed that players, activists, as well as coaches of teams from the three competition classes, and even the then national team coach, were involved in the procedure of buying match results. It was also pointed out that the match-fixing was systemic, which meant that not a few, but at least a dozen clubs from the three competition classes were involved in the corruption, as well as people responsible for the development of national team football, led by the PZPN authorities. In June 2006, police arrested Richard F., known by his nickname "Barber." As a result of the findings of the law enforcement investigation, the so-called "Barber's list" was formulated, which included information on 28 arbitrators refereeing football matches in the first and second leagues, some of whom also refereed international matches. These referees were constantly contacted by "Barber", carrying out corrupt activities as part of an organized criminal group. The contact was aimed at bribing referees to determine specific decisions on Polish soccer fields.

The PZPN suspended most of the referees on the "Barber's list," and some of them were detained by district prosecutors' offices across the country.

What's more, common courts began convicting more people between 2005 and 2011 who were proven to have participated in either giving or accepting bribes in exchange for arranging specific results on the field. Among those sentenced to prison terms, suspended prison terms, or fines, in addition to the "Barber" himself, were football players, sports activists, coaches, and referees, among others. Corruption procedures have also been detected within the PZPN authorities themselves, leading to the conviction of several PZPN board members, among others. Risks of corruption offenses were also reported against other long-time PZPN activists, and such information undermined the status of Polish soccer in public opinion and led to numerous dismissals within the association's structures.

CONCLUSIONS

The presented examples of corruption in Polish soccer certainly do not constitute a closed catalogue, and at the level of the lower competition classes the problem of corruption is a constant threat. Referring to media coverage in recent years, it was found that the problem of participation in corrupt arrangements involved a large number of people additionally holding various positions and fulfilling diverse functions in soccer. The messages emphasized both exposing the corruption of activists and players, the indulgence of corrupt arrangements by referees, as well as the participation of the latter in, for example, betting on matches in bookmaker betting shops. The featured corruption scandals in Polish soccer have been revealed recently. The media declared a triumph over the fight against corruption in Polish sports. But it cannot be ruled out that the phenomenon still persists. The threat of corruption in sports requires further observation with the cooperation of law enforcement agencies and national and regional football authorities.

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