

Socio-cultural issues in physical activity and sport

### Topic area – ethics and deviance in sport including:

- Drugs and doping in sport
- Violence in sport
- **Gambling in sport**
  - Match fixing / bribery
  - Illegal sports betting

This article will look at the issue of **gambling in sport** and its links with match fixing / bribery and illegal sports betting. Each of these practices seriously threatens sport's traditional ethics or morals and can be classed as 'deviance' which remember is 'seriously breaking the rules (or perhaps more appropriately in this case), the **norms** of sport'.

#### We'll consider:

1. Linked terminology
2. Background and update
3. Illegal sports betting
  - a) Why do people bet illegally on sport?
  - b) How does sport's illegal betting industry operate?
  - c) What's the difference between legal and illegal betting?
  - d) Are there risks for 'punters'?
  - e) Why is illegal betting an issue?
4. Match fixing / bribery – what it can involve
  - examples
  - opportunity for a classroom debate
5. Final ethical considerations
6. Recap / review / questions to consider
7. Appendix - web links

#### 1. Linked terminology

- **Illegal sports betting** – placing a bet with an unregistered bookmaker ('bookie'); linked to match-fixing and organized crime.
  - **Match fixing** - playing a game to a completely or partially pre-determined result. So, when a player, team or referee deliberately under-performs to ensure that one team loses or draws. This is against the rules of the game and often against the law. Match fixing is sometimes called **game fixing, race fixing, sports fixing** or **hippodroming**
  - **Bribery** - the practice of offering money to gain a dishonest advantage
- Terms linked with match fixing:**
- **Spot betting** – betting on certain events or outcomes during a match which can be gambled on, but which are unlikely to prove decisive in determining the end result. Also known as spot fixing or micro / exotic betting

- Film maker, Leni Reifenstahl, commissioned...
- Radio also used extensively to report on the...
- After rise of Nazis - & reports of anti-Semitic games / some discussion of re-locating gam...
- Assurances given that Jews would be allowe...
- 1 'token' Jewish competitor selected for the...
- Desire for German Olympic team success – s...

#### Example

After his... while play... kick-off s... was in a...

In 2010, gamblers... of the... accepting... deliberat... Yard arr... (ICC), b... bookie a...

#### Terms li

- TH... hi...
  - Sa... op...
2. B... Betting a... often acc... fixing thr... dive' sinc... The relat... betting. A... mobile g... thousand...
  3. I... Much of... betting o... worth hu... sports b...

#### a) V

### Examples 1 and 2 - spot betting:

After his retirement from playing for Southampton FC, Matt Le Tissier, admitted that while playing in 1995 he tried (and failed) to kick the ball out of play immediately after kick-off so that a group of associates would win a bet made on an early throw-in. This was in a Premier League match against Wimbledon FC.

In 2010, Pakistani cricketers were accused of bowling specific no balls for the benefit of gamblers, notably the bookmaker Mazhar Majeed. Undercover reporters from the News of the World newspaper (no longer in existence), secretly filmed Mazhar Majeed accepting money and informing the reporters that fast bowlers Asif and Amir would deliberately bowl no balls at specific points in an over – leading to spot-fixing. Scotland Yard arrested Majeed on the charge of match fixing, and the International Cricket Council (ICC), banned three players for between five and 10 years. Then in November 2011, the bookie and all players were given prison sentences, ranging from 6-32 months.

### Terms linked with match fixing, but not necessarily with betting / gambling:

- **Thrown games or 'tanking'** when a team deliberately loses, or does not score as highly as it can, in order to obtain a perceived future competitive advantage.
- **Sandbagging** – the equivalent of 'tanking' in sports with handicap system that is open to abuse

## 2. Background and update

Betting and sport have always gone together. In the Ancient Olympic Games, athletes were often accused of accepting bribes to lose. Chariot racing had a dreadful reputation of race fixing throughout its history. Similarly in boxing, fighters have been accused of 'taking a dive' since sport began.

The relationship between sport and betting has been damaged more recently by illegal betting. And in the last decade the nature of gambling has shifted more to interactive and mobile gambling. 'Punters' can now bet on a huge and increasing list of sports via thousands of online bookmakers.

## 3. Illegal sports betting

Much of the illegal sports betting industry is alleged to be in Asia. Closer to home, legal betting on sport is huge in the UK. Worldwide, the gambling industry is estimated to be worth hundreds of billions of pounds a year. Match fixing goes hand in hand with illegal sports betting.

### a) Why do people bet illegally on sport?

#### Because:

- in countries where all betting is illegal it's the only option
- in other countries, some illegal betting syndicates offer better odds (and therefore better pay-offs) than legal bookies
- in countries where social norms prevent overt, legal betting and where on-line betting is barred, illegal betting is the only option

**b) How does sport's illegal betting industry operate?**

- Secretively, via a hierarchy
- From the bottom up; gamblers place bets with 'bookies' (above them) who received odds from their 'managers' (yet further up the hierarchy)
- The 'manager' might manage a group of 'bookies' within a city or region
- Others (still higher up the chain) give the managers their information
- The secrecy and nature of the system makes it very difficult for police to intervene, act and stop the practice.

**c) What's the difference between legal and illegal betting?**

- placing the bet with an **unregistered** bookmaker ('bookie') makes it illegal
- also, legality varies from country to country. While it's legal in Singapore to bet in a betting shop, it's illegal to bet online; in India all sports betting is illegal.

**d) Are there risks for 'punters'?**

**Yes, because:**

- no records are kept; a 'bookie' could refuse to pay up
- as the bookie is the punter's only contact, there is no channel of appeal for the 'punter' as they can't go to the police!
- gamblers could become greedy and / or 'hooked'
- gamblers wouldn't know if they were being encouraged into making a 'dodgy' bet, where a favourable outcome for them was impossible / with the result having already been decided against them.

**e) Why is illegal betting an issue?**

**Because:**

- it is against the law!
- it costs governments 'millions' in lost tax revenue
- it is unfair – illegal bookmakers (having prior knowledge of the outcome), can influence the odds to ensure maximum profit
- it adversely impacts on profits for legal bookmakers, (whose odds cannot be as favourable as those of illegal 'bookies')
- it could potentially damage the reputation of people who bet legally

**And perhaps more importantly:**

- young players can be influenced and perhaps even 'bullied' into cheating
- it damages the spirit, image and ethics of sport
- it leads to **match-fixing/bribery**

**4. Match fixing/bribery can involve:**

- payoffs from 'bookies', and so ... contacts / relationships between gamblers, players, team officials, and/or referees
- deliberately fixing the result, or a particular incident within a sporting contest, by:
  - intentional misapplication of rules by officials
  - interference with the play or playing surfaces by venue staff
  - coaches substituting players in order to increase the team's chances of losing
  - perhaps a key player/s could be 'taken off', with a minor or phantom injury
  - intentional under-performance - teams might deliberately lose, play to a draw or to a fixed score for personal or mutual benefit e.g. so both advance to the next stage of a tournament. This can be very difficult to prove.

### Example 3 – intentional underperformance

In the London 2010 Olympic women's football tournament, the Japan coach strongly denied having instructed his players to intentionally play to a draw against South Africa in Cardiff in the pool stages, in order to finish second in the group.

Finishing second avoided a 600 mile round trip to Glasgow for the first round of the knockout stage. Instead Japan stayed in Cardiff and beat Brazil in the quarterfinal, then went on to beat France in the semis, finally losing to the USA 2-1 in the final, coming away with the silver medal.

This football controversy occurred after what the BBC called a 'night of shame,' in the women's badminton competition. (see Example 6)

### Example 4 – intentionally playing for a draw

In knockout competitions (where rules might require drawn matches to be replayed), teams have occasionally been accused of intentionally playing one or more draws so as to ensure a replay, and thus additional revenue for both teams.

An historic example of this type of alleged fix was the 1909 football Scottish Cup Final which resulted in a riot by spectators after twice being played to a draw.

### Example 5 – is there match fixing in tennis?

'Buzz Feed News' and the BBC conducted a year-long investigation into tennis and concluded that match-fixing is widespread.

#### In January 2016 they alleged that:

- a core group of 16 top players were at the centre of the corruption
- a syndicate operates in Russia and Italy
- corruption in tennis is easy, as only one player needs to agree, rather than a team; and players are skilful enough to make precision shots; just in or just out.

In response, world number one Novak Djokovic said that he and his team had been approached and immediately rejected a call to fix a match.

Roger Federer on the issue: *'It doesn't matter how much money you pump into the system, there's always going to be people approaching players, or people, in any sport. It's all a question of money...I agree we should have more money at Future, Challengers, all these levels, but it's not going to solve the issue. The issue is elsewhere, in the player's mind.'*

### **Example 6: Intentionally playing to lose – Badminton London 2012**

Eight players (both pairs from South Korea and one pair each from China and Indonesia) were thrown out of the badminton Olympic tournament having been found guilty of "not using best efforts" and "conducting oneself in a manner that is clearly abusive or detrimental to the sport" by playing to lose matches in order to manipulate the draw for the knockout stage. Players all made simple errors throughout their matches, resulting in boos from the crowd and warnings from the match referee to resume playing 'properly'.

### **Debate this issue:**

The badminton players broke no written rules. By choosing to underperform, they were simply trying to win the tournament, which is the aim of sport. Saving energy in early matches is a common practice in many sports

## **5. Final ethical Considerations**

Match fixing and other forms of corruption/unethical behaviour within a specific sport are usually dealt with internally by the individual sport. Each governing body has set rules and penalties against this practice.

Gambling is usually associated with adults, but more recent evidence suggests involvement by younger people, with younger athletes at risk of being bribed into unethical behaviour for financial gain. And an early involvement with gambling can lead to significant gambling problems later in life.

Overall, it is unethical to remove the uncertainty / 'chance' normally associated with sport or to deliberately influence the course or result of a sporting event for an unfair advantage for oneself or others.

It is essential that sport retains its integrity so that spectators have confidence in sport as a contemporary concept to be enjoyed. Twenty-first century spectators, (whether having placed a bet or not), deserve fair and honest results and ethical participation by everyone involved. (see questions overleaf)

Sarah van Wely  
February 2016

1. What is meant by the following:
  - a. Throwing a game or 'tanking'
  - b. Spot betting

[2]
2. What's the key difference (other than legality) between legal and illegal sports betting?

[1]
3. Give three reasons why an individual or team might choose to under-perform.

[3]
4. Identify four ways that a match might actually be 'fixed' by players.

[4]
5. In what ways is match fixing / bribery / illegal sports betting unethical?

[3]
6. Give two examples from contemporary sport of match fixing for monetary reasons.

[2]

**15 marks total**

## **Web links**

### **Example 2**

<https://goo.gl/LtzkOV>

### **Example 6**

<https://goo.gl/TaugSB>

<https://goo.gl/E4z9nI>