

<b>Institution:</b> Birkbeck, University of London
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 17, Business and Management
<b>Title of case study:</b> Don't Fix It! Fighting match-fixing in European football
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2013-14
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014 to date
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>In 2013-14 Hamil, Harvey and Levi were recruited by FIFPro, the global football players' union, to conduct research into football match fixing as part of the <i>Don't Fix It!</i> project. Their work formed the basis for a code of conduct adopted by every key stakeholder organisation in European football, and a training programme that saw national associations develop and deliver anti-match-fixing initiatives in all eight of the countries concerned. <i>Don't Fix It!</i> also underpinned the development of the Red Button App for anonymously reporting match-fixing; first developed with the Finnish players' union but now adopted worldwide and expanded into sports beyond football, protecting both players and the sports they play.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Match-fixing is an issue for professional sports because it undermines their attractiveness to spectators and is therefore economically damaging to the industry. It is also a problem of broader social concern because match-fixing is typically orchestrated by criminal groups who use the proceeds to fund other criminal activities. Players may be groomed or blackmailed in order to persuade them into participation: older players are often used to recruit younger players and in sports or countries where players receive little remuneration for their work, the financial pressure to cheat can be compelling.</p> <p>Research carried out by FIFPro (the global representative trade union for professional football players) as part of its 2011-12 <i>Black Book</i> survey into the employment conditions of players in Eastern Europe found that 11.9% of players reported having been approached to fix the result of a match, while 23.6% were aware of match-fixing taking place in their league. FIFPro was seriously concerned by these findings and committed to explore the problem further. It secured funding from the European Commission and from UEFA (the governing body of European football), as well as operational support from professional footballer associations in Greece, Slovenia, Romania, Norway, Finland, Hungary, Scotland and England, to support the <i>Don't Fix It!</i> project, which ran from January 2013 to June 2014.</p> <p>The research element of this project was contracted to Hamil and Harvey, both researchers at the Birkbeck Sport Business Centre (BSBC) with expertise in sports governance and the football industry (see [1], [2]). BSBC had been researching the match-fixing phenomenon for several years. Notably, Hamil and Levi carried out background research on the regulatory frameworks for addressing match-fixing in UK sport, and in particular football, for Transparency International (TI) in 2012-13. The results were presented at a joint TI/Norton Rose Fulbright LLP seminar in June 2013 and informed a good practice guide, <i>Safeguarding the Beautiful Game: A Guide to Preventing Match-Fixing in Football at Club Level</i> (August 2014).</p> <p>In collaboration with FIFPro, Hamil, Harvey and Levi developed a questionnaire which was completed by 1,585 players in eight countries, as well as conducting qualitative interviews with numerous key stakeholders. They published the results of this work in a research report in May 2014 [3]. Amongst the report's key findings were that solutions to match-fixing were best developed at the local level because the nature of the problem varied widely across different contexts; that education was most effectively delivered by people whom players already knew and trusted (role model figures such as older players were very helpful here); and that match-fixing could be best addressed through a holistic approach that took into account the conditions under which a player was working and living, as well as establishing clear rules and expectations and appealing to players' personal morality.</p> <p>Academic articles building on the findings of the report have followed [4, 5, 6].</p>

**3. References to the research**

1. Hamil, S., Morrow, S., Idle, C., Rossi, G. & Faccendini, S. (2010) The governance and regulation of Italian football. *Soccer & Society* 11 (4), pp. 373-413. ISSN 1466-0970.
2. Walters, G. and Hamil, S. (2013) The contests for power and influence over the regulator space in the English professional football industry, 1980-2012. *Business History* 55 (5), 740-767. ISSN 0007-6791.
3. Harvey, A & Levi, H. (2014). *Don't Fix It! Players Questionnaire – Results & Analysis*. FIFPro/Birkbeck.
4. Harvey, A. & Levi, H. (2015) 'Match-fixing in International Sport'. In Terri Byers (Ed.), *Contemporary Issues in Sport Management: A Critical Introduction*. Canada: University of New Brunswick.
5. Harvey, A. (2015). Match-Fixing: Working Towards an Ethical Framework. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 42(3), 393-407. doi:10.1080/00948705.2015.1037767
6. Harvey, A. (2015) Social Marketing: Discouraging Fraud and Corruption in Sport. *ICSS Journal* 3 (3).

**Details of External Research Grants**

The project, 'Don't Fix It!' had a budget of €300,000, of which the research element was worth approximately €24,000.

**4. Details of the impact**

Match fixing represents one of the 'biggest threats' to professional football worldwide, jeopardising the game not only from an ethical, but also from an economical point of view. 'The global annual criminal proceeds from betting-related match-fixing are estimated at €120 million' and 'Football remains the most-targeted sport by international OCGs [Organised Criminal Gangs]' (Europol, 2020). Match fixing victimises players who, in many less wealthy countries, may be in difficult financial situations and therefore provide easy targets for match fixers. For FIFPro, whose business is to protect the 65,000 professional footballers that it represents worldwide, match fixing has therefore become a priority issue [A].

Funded by the European Commission and UEFA, FIFPro's *Don't Fix It!* project was a major initiative whose impact continues to be felt across and beyond the professional footballing community worldwide. The research conducted by Harvey, Hamil and Levi has underpinned the development of training programmes not only within, but beyond the eight countries who participated in the original project; has strengthened FIFPro's collaborative relationship with organisations such as Interpol, FIFA and UEFA, allowing a joined-up approach to tackling this global issue; and has underpinned the development of a mobile app which protects players by allowing them to fulfil their mandated reporting duty anonymously and safely and which is now operational in 51 countries worldwide.

The research element of the *Don't Fix It!* project was focused on a survey undertaken across eight participating countries: England, Scotland, Norway, Finland, Romania, Hungary, Slovenia and Greece. The survey developed a detailed picture of the match-fixing landscape across these countries, looking at the proportion of players who had been approached (or were aware of others being approached) to fix matches, the reasons why players might participate in match-fixing, and exploring any barriers to reporting these incidents. The results of the survey were published in a report in May 2014 [3] but were also used as the foundation for a good practice guide, *Protect Our Game*, launched at a roundtable conference in Slovenia in June 2014, for a code of conduct, also titled *Protect Our Game*, and for a 'Don't Fix It' training conference held in June 2014.

The code of conduct, *Protect Our Game*, was signed in September 2014 by the Presidents of four key stakeholder organisations in European Football: FIFPro, UEFA, the European Club Association (ECA), and the European Professional Football Leagues (EPFL). This was an important milestone in the joint fight against match fixing: it was the first time that such an agreement had been reached and the first joint statement on the subject from these organisations. Signatories agreed that 'all participants in European Football' would subscribe to the principles outlined in the code, which are informed by the results of Harvey's research: in line with the findings of the *Don't Fix It!* report, which found that 'personal ethics' were a

'key weapon in the fight against match-fixing' [3, p.87], players are reminded of their moral responsibility as representatives of the game: 'Be Clean', 'Be Open'.

Feedback collected from the eight participating football associations in 2016 shows that the code of conduct was widely distributed amongst European footballers after its production. In [country A], the code was distributed to all active professional football players, in England to all 4,000 members of the Professional Footballers' Association, and in [country B], both players and coaching staff were encouraged to carry the printed code with them all the time to remind them of the importance of the issue. The [country C] and [country D] players' associations translated the code into local languages, with [country C] reporting that the code had been delivered to all clubs and changing rooms and that the initiative was deeply welcomed by the players and by the club officials as well.

*Don't Fix It!* hosted a training conference in Budapest in June 2014, where football stakeholders including players' union representatives, referees, and football federation officials from the key participating nations were supported in developing training programmes targeted to their local context. Experts from players' associations, legal bodies and academia (including Harvey) delivered training around match-fixing issues and encouraged participants to apply these lessons to their home environments. This reflected a key research finding: that 'country-specific solutions that are owned by the local stakeholders are the best way forward to tackle threats to integrity in football.' [3, p.87] All participants were required to produce draft national training programmes at the end of the course.

Comments from the [country B players' union] show the impact of this conference: 'We were filled with useful information... which I sincerely had not heard of before in my 20-year career as a professional football player... When we returned to [country B]... we set up a plan in accordance with the methodology and the actions programmed at the Congress'. In practice, this meant not only the distribution of the code of conduct, but the installation of anti-match fixing posters in locker rooms across the country; a programme of educational visits from senior authority figures not only to professional football clubs, but to schools and youth academies; the successful organisation of [country B]'s first-ever national conference on match-fixing; and the creation of a steering group in which [key national stakeholders] participated. This was the first time these various stakeholders had collaborated on a problem by which they were all affected.

[Country C] established a separate integrity office under the aegis of its national football association and carried out training that was explicitly shaped by the findings of Harvey's research: 'We tried to follow the principle of delivering the content of the program by the right people, in the right way and at the right time. We involved former players who could talk about the issue and act as a role model to other players. We emphasized the post-career programs and collected other stakeholders from the football area as supporters of our initiations.' The Finnish union, JPY, was able to use the project as a vehicle to build cross-stakeholder dialogue and initiate a coordinated strategic response to match-fixing whereby the union, the Finnish leagues and the police service worked together [K]. The Scottish Professional Footballers' Association worked with the Scottish Football Association (SFA) to establish a national integrity taskforce composed of representatives of the SFA, SPFL, PFAS, Coaches and Managers' Association, the police, and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Services, and reported that it was their involvement in *Don't Fix It!* which gave them the financial and informational resources' necessary to develop this 'more effective multi-stakeholder response [C].

This training development initiative continues to impact practice. The English Professional Footballers' Association reports that *Don't Fix It!* allowed the union to make decisions based on evidence-led data and structure its educational initiatives to address the issue more effectively, with *Don't Fix It!* acting as an important contributory factor in the evolution of the PFA's current keystone anti-match-fixing education initiative, *Protect the Game* [D]. Player education on match-fixing issues Europe-wide can therefore be seen to have its foundation in the work of Harvey, Hamil and Levi.

The relationship-building exemplified in the joint FIFPro, UEFA, ECA and EPFL support for *Don't Fix It!*'s new code of conduct, as well as in the local collaborations described above, has been another of the project's key legacies. In a follow-up study published in a peer-reviewed journal in 2020, Harvey interviewed key stakeholders in Scottish football about the project's legacy [E]. He found that, by encouraging the development of a cross-sector taskforce, *Don't Fix It!* had empowered the players' association to speak up on other issues. One of Harvey's interviewees reported that 'It's given us a voice within the game... we've become seen as a credible organisation in the eyes of the stakeholders' [E]. As a consequence, the PFAS has 'secured membership of other Scottish football committees and working groups', giving players a new voice on matters such as anti-doping, league structure and on-field discipline which directly affect their daily lives. 'Gaining credibility with, and respect from, other stakeholders... is viewed by the union as a major benefit of the 'Don't Fix It!' project'. There have also been financial impacts as (for example) the SFA has 'expanded the role of the Head of Security and Integrity', hiring a deputy (i.e. creating a new post) to help with the increased workload [E].

For FIFPro, *Don't Fix It!* provided an opportunity to solidify links not only with other major footballing bodies but with the policing agencies concerned with match-fixing's criminal aspects. In an article published by FIFPro in June 2014, FIFPro vice-president and project lead, Tony Higgins, commented that the project had 'improved our contacts with both Europol and Interpol' [F]; a key concern given the close association between football match-fixing and organised crime. This strengthened relationship had immediate impact. In October 2014, FIFPro announced a new, high-profile campaign in collaboration with FIFA and Interpol, 'following on from' *Don't Fix It!* (which had concluded shortly before) [G]. This project, which saw the worldwide distribution of a 15-minute DVD including testimony from celebrity players, had a worldwide scope and was described by the FIFPro Secretary General as 'mark[ing] the start of a coordinated approach' between the three major organisations, 'tak[ing] our efforts to protect the integrity of the game and its actors to a whole new level' [G]. 'Sports corruption is by definition a transnational issue', where bets are placed in different locations to where matches take place, players regularly move across borders, and 'cross-border financial transactions' are the norm (Europol, 2020), so the ongoing collaboration between FIFPro and Interpol is essential to tackling these crimes.

Further pioneering collaborations have been facilitated through the development and distribution of the Red Button app. This was a critical outcome of the *Don't Fix It!* project for the Finnish players' union JPY. During the life of the project, they collaborated with FIFPro (and were funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture) to develop Red Button, a mobile app which allows players anonymously to report information relating to football match-fixing [K]. This was in line with the key recommendation in Harvey's report that players be given 'multiple... avenues' to report possible match-fixing approaches and that they should be assured of the anonymity of any report [3, p.87]. After a successful trial in the Finnish context [H], subsequent projects have seen this app receive a much wider distribution.

FIFPro's *Say No to Match-Fixing* campaign, which launched in 2016, disseminated the app to players' unions across Europe, with an accompanying video from well-known players and with dressing-room visits from union and FA representatives (again, in line with Harvey's recommendations). A 2018 report to the European Commission found that the app had been downloaded more than 1,200 times in Finland alone and that its regular use had 'proved its value' [I]; and a 2019 study by Liverpool University saw the app 'ranked the highest of 20 whistle-blower apps in international sports' [J]. In 2020, FIFPro signed an agreement with FIFA whereby the Red Button app is recognised by FIFA and its dedicated Integrity department as a valid reporting tool and FIFA will investigate confidential information submitted via the Red Button app that is shared by FIFPRO, paving the way for its further distribution worldwide [A]. FIFPro anticipate signing a similar agreement with UEFA in the near future. The app has now been launched in 51 countries and its rollout continues [A].

The app's acceptance by these major bodies is important because players are required by both FIFA and UEFA regulations to report any match-fixing approaches made to them but



until now, it has not always been clear to whom this report should be made. Players compete in a variety of matches under different football jurisdictions. A friendly game is governed by FIFA, an under-21 Euro qualifying match by UEFA and competition matches by the national FA. Players may not know which agency to report to and may in fact report to outside agencies such as national police forces [A]. In the past, this has resulted in players being penalised for insufficient reporting even though they believed that they had fulfilled their obligations. FIFA and UEFA's adoption of the Red Button app therefore provides a universal reporting avenue which is anonymous and which players can use directly from their personal phone. This is particularly important when there are already significant barriers to reporting (i.e. players may fear being penalised or fear repercussions from the criminal gangs by whom match-fixing rings are run).

The Red Button app has also been applied outside of the footballing sphere. Funded by the EU through Erasmus+, and by a number of betting associations, the 2016 PROtect Integrity project and 2018-19 Protect Integrity Plus were European programmes which further developed the Red Button app and expanded its application to 'professional athletes from 7 EU countries (UK, Ireland, France, Denmark, Greece, Italy, Spain), and 5 different sports (rugby, basketball, handball, volleyball, futsal)' [J]. Harvey, Hamil and Levi's work is therefore protecting both players and participants not only in professional football worldwide but in these other sports across Europe.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- A. Testimonial from FIFPro Director of Member Services
- B. Impact surveys completed by *Don't Fix It!* participants in 2016
- C. Testimonial from Chief Executive, PFA Scotland
- D. Testimonial from Assistant Chief Executive, the Professional Footballers' Association (England)
- E. Harvey, A (2020), 'Fixing it for PFA Scotland: building union influence out of a transnational project to tackle match-fixing in football', *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 12(3): 423-438.
- F. 'FIFPro and UEFA continue match-fixing fight', news article on FIFPro website, June 2014
- G. 'FIFA, FIFPro and INTERPOL launch joint campaign to fight match manipulation', news article on fifa.com, 30 October 2014
- H. 'Finnish match-fixing app shows its value', news story on FIFPro website, April 2014
- I. *Mapping of Corruption in Sport in the EU*, report to the European Commission, December 2018
- J. Buraimo, B and D. Forrest (2019), *Report on 'Protect Integrity Plus': Roll-out of the Red Button app to new sports and new countries*. University of Liverpool.
- K. Testimonial from Executive Manager, Football Players' Association of Finland (Jalkapallon pelaajayhdistys)