

An international anti-corruption agency for sport

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by Declan Hill

Author of worldwide best seller "The Fix", Declan Hill has been pushing for years international sport institutions to adopt more efficient countermeasure for countering corruption and match-fixing in sports, particularly in soccer.

Last week, the European ministers of sport passed a unanimous resolution to ask the Council of Europe to help set up an international agency to fight corruption in sport.

What does this mean? Well, like all political promises it can be about as important as a sneeze in a windstorm. However, there are signs that this time things might be different. Already the charismatic Irish senator Cecilia Keaveney is pushing for adoption of a political resolution among Irish and European politicians. Drago Kos, the hard-hitting Chief of the Anti-Corruption Agency in Slovenia, is gathering support among other anti-corruption crusaders in Europe. And one of the senior executives of the Council of Europe excitedly told me after the vote that his organization wanted to 'midwife' such a new agency.

Why does sport need such an organization? Here is part of my speech for the sports ministers in Baku:

I stand before you as man who has no agenda. I do not represent any gambling company or interest. I am not trying to peddle you something so that my company can make money. I do not work for a sporting organization, so I do not have a slant or angle on one particular sport. Rather, I stand before you as man who has risked his life to protect sports. I stand before you to say that sport is too important to be entrusted only to sporting or gambling authorities. This is not a dig, many sporting and gambling executives are good, honest, decent people, but they have an inherent conflict of interest in suppressing news about corruption in sport.

What we are facing is too dangerous to let the status quo continue. There has always been corruption in sport, but what is happening for our generation, in our time, on our watch is something different. It is a new phenomenon. It is a new form of corruption, as if someone has taken fixing and injected it with steroids. Let us not exaggerate, the corruption in European sports is not nearly as bad as it is in Asian sports. But it is coming down the pipeline. It has already come into some European sports. And unless we do something about it this new wave of corruption will destroy sports as we know them. This new form of corruption will, like a tsunami, sweep aside all other issues in sports and leave our sports dead and destroyed.

I have been in the same room with the fixers as they fixed different games in different sports on different continents. The tools that allow them to do this are new. Because this wave of corruption is new, we need a new institution to fight it properly. We need an International Anti-Corruption Agency for sports, designed in part like the World Anti-Doping Agency. This Agency can collect and publicize information with no fear of a conflict of interest. This Agency can certify leagues and sports with good governance practices. This Agency can investigate and prosecute the fixers, can educate and train the athletes. This Agency could protect sports, so that when the day comes for us to pass them on to our children and their children, we can pass on sports knowing that they are largely corruption free. We can pass on sports that can inspire people, motivate people and make them realize that they are bigger than they think they are...

We shall see if such an agency will come to pass, but it was a good, important first step.