Emerging Trends in Corruption in Sport: Implications for Sport Management

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Governance

Abstract 2014-125

Academic attention on corruption in sport has focused on two lines of enquiry: defining corruption (Maennig, 2005; Hughes & Coakley, 1999) and identifying the impacts of corruption on the business of sport (Gorse & Chadwick, 2010; Connor & Mazanov, 2010). Gorse & Chadwick (2010) argue that corruption in international sport undermines the integrity of sporting competition and impacts on the foundations of the sport ethic–fair play and the concept of uncertainty of outcome. Developing from Neale’s (1964) Louis-Schmelling-Paradox, with a foundation of Rottenberg’s (1956) theory of competitive balance, the uncertainty of outcome hypothesis is based on the principle that the more unpredictable the result of a sporting competition is, the greater the demand will be for that competition (Alavy et al, 2006). As suggested by McLaren (2008: 15), the integrity of sporting competition is pivotal to its success – once lost, “it is very difficult to ever retrieve”. Knowing the result of a game or race, or discovering afterwards that the winner had used performance enhancing substances, can impact on television viewing and attendance figures of sporting events (Preston & Syzmanski, 2006), potentially effecting the revenue generated from media organisation in television rights. Sponsors may not want to be associated with athletes, teams, sports or events that have a history tarnished by cheating due to the potential impact on brand equity and perception and, as a result, on sales. Advertisers and media organisations may not want to be seen as being associated with those associated with a scandal and major challenges are presented to the gambling industry (Forrest & Simmons, 2006), governing bodies and legal entities, like the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in managing of these cases.

One of the fundamental issues in defining corruption is the understanding that behaviour deemed corrupt needs to deviate from normal duties or to be seen as violating rules. Collins et al (2009) state that “at least three key issues confound the study of corruption; it is difficult to define, difficult to observe, and difficult to measure” (90). Jain (2001) further states that “how corruption is defined actually ends up determining what gets measured and modelled” (73). The literature on corruption in sport is underdeveloped, although there is a significant body of literature on corruption in other settings, for example in business (Eicher, 2009; den Nieuwenboer & Kaptein, 2008) and in politics (Heidenheimer, 2007) in particular. In the limited published research in the area of corruption in sport, there is a lack of consensus about the behaviours that actually constitutes it. From a sociological perspective, Hughes & Coakley (1999) suggest that corruption, and in particular doping, is seen as a form of positive deviance and overconforming to the sport ethic in that athletes choose to adopt this kind of behaviour to enhance their status as an athlete by doing everything they can to be successful. Conversely, the economic perspective, as discussed by Maennig (2005), suggests that it is actively allowing an opponent to win a sporting competition in return for financial reward (i.e. bribe or payment) that is defined as corruption. The contention here is that neither perspective offers a true representation of corruption in sport and further argues that these definitions are at odds with one another – how can an athlete be doing everything to overconform to the sport ethic, to be seen as an athlete, and allow an opponent to win? Gorse & Chadwick (2010) offer a new definition of corruption in sport as “any illegal, immoral or unethical activity that attempts to deliberately distort the outcome of a sporting contest (or an element within the contest) for the personal material gain of one or more parties involved in the activity”, and includes activities such as doping, tanking, match fixing and spot fixing. It is based on this definition that a thorough analysis of the prevalence of such behaviour is conducted, an examination missing in current corruption literature. This examination of the prevalence of corruption in sport is vital to developing an understanding of the scope and magnitude of the issue at hand and recognising the impact of such behaviour on stakeholders, and in particular sponsors, in the sport industry.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the prevalence of corruption in sport in order to identify emerging trends and key issues presented by these cases of corrupt behaviour for sport management. In order to operationalise the proposed definition of corruption in sport and develop a thorough understanding of the prevalence of such behaviour, the authors have compiled a unique database of cases of corruption in different sports and from across
the sporting world. These cases have then been coded into category-sets (Guetzkow, 1950), recording the year in which the incident occurred (where the incident spanned for more than one year, the earliest date from which the corrupt activity began was recorded), country of origin (home country of the athlete, team or official involved in the corrupt behaviour), type of sport, name of the athlete, team or official involved, type of corruption and outcome of the activity (punishment or details of outside influences) of each case, to identify key themes and patterns of corruption in sport. This paper presents the findings of a preliminary analysis of 2,089 cases of corruption in sport that occurred between 2000 and 2010. Of these cases recorded on the database in the given timeframe, 95.64% are doping cases, where athletes have used substances banned by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). Of these doping cases, 76.58% occurred in Europe and North America and more than 80% occurred in athletics, cycling and American sports. The remaining 4.36% is split: betting related match-fixing (1.58%), non-betting related match-fixing (1.15%) and the misuse of inside information (1.63%).

This paper presents further findings focused on the changes in corruption in the database and some characteristics of individuals engaging in corrupt behaviour. The implications of this analysis of the prevalence of corruption in sport are far-reaching for governance and management of sport organisations and the wider sport industry. This paper will go on to discuss these implications further for all stakeholders in the sport industry, with a particular emphasis on sponsors and the management of sponsorship programmes.

References