

‘Eyes on the Ball, Head on the Game (...and Hands in the Honey Pot)’: *An introduction to the special issue on ‘Sports, Corruption and Organized Crime’*

Abstract

This paper provides an introduction to the articles, report excerpts and book reviews submitted to the special issue of *Trends in Organized Crime* bringing forward numerous empirical research findings and theoretical accounts on sports, corruption and ‘organized crime’.

Keywords: Sports, illegal markets, match-fixing, doping, corruption, organized crime

The ‘Good’, the ‘Bad’ and the ‘Beautiful’

Unethical and/or criminal practices in sports are not a new phenomenon. Historical research such as this published in the journal *Archaeology* (1996 cited in European Commission, 2012: 10), suggests that the first *documented* case of match-fixing seems to be that of Eupolos of Thessaly who bribed three of his boxing competitors in order to win a gold medal at the Olympic Games of 338 BC in Greece (see also Manoli and Antonopoulos, this issue). Ancient Greek athletes also drank various brandy and wine mixes and ate hallucinogenic mushrooms and sesame seeds to enhance performance, the gladiators in Rome’s Colosseum used stimulants to overcome fatigue and injuries, and knights in the medieval era used unspecified stimulants to improve stamina in the battle (Yesalis and Bahkre, 2002).¹

In 1915, the –normally– bitter soccer rivals from the northwest of England, Manchester United F.C and Liverpool F.C. fixed a match for money in conditions that were unfavorable for soccer as World War I threatened to shut down the league thus jeopardizing the players’ wages (Dunlavy, 2014; Aaronovitch, 1995; see also excerpt from European Commission report, this issue).

A very interesting case from 1960s Britain involved an audacious attempt to dope one of the horses owned by the royal family, an incident which alerted the British police to a gang of racecourse criminals including an ex-Royal Air Force sergeant turned oddsmaker, ex-jockeys, stable workers and a drugs supplier nicknamed ‘The Witch Doctor’ (Reid, 2014). Later, in the 1970s and 1980s, the more powerful Italian-American ‘families’ that controlled a significant part of the illicit drugs market, identified another source of revenue in the market of anabolic steroids, a business area they controlled until about the mid-1990s when the market was allegedly taken over by Russian criminals (Donati, 2007).

In recent years, there have been numerous performance enhancing drug scandals tainting the image of professional and Olympic sports such as the Olympic track star, Marion Jones, who was sentenced to six month imprisonment for lying to an anabolic steroid investigative body, the turmoil surrounding the Festina cycling team (in 1998), the *Tour-de-France* seven times winner, Lance Armstrong, as well as numerous cases of fixing in popular sports such as football in Turkey, China, Italy and Spain, basketball, sumo wrestling in Japan

¹ Yesalis and Bahkre (2002) offer a wonderful and extensive account of the history of doping in sports with a plethora of examples.

(Duggan & Levitt, 2002), tennis (Cambers, 2014) and cricket in India among other sports (see Kraska *et al.*, 2010; Brooks *et al.*, 2013; Yar, 2014; see also Fincoeur *et al.*, this issue). In 2013, Europol officials suggested that they had uncovered an ‘organized crime syndicate’ based in Asia and liaising with criminal networks in Europe, with around 425 match officials, football club officials, players and criminals, that was responsible for manipulating approximately 380 matches in various competitions (The Guardian, 2013).

There are three very important reasons that help explain corrupt practices in sports especially in the post-World War II period. These are: (1) the professionalization of sports and an emphasis of winning; (2) the politicization of sports with competition among western and Soviet bloc athletes becoming a manifestation of the Cold War; and (3) the commercialization of sports and the building of a vast sports (and health) industry (Paoli and Donati, 2014) in which chemically enhanced performance (and appearance) seems to be an acceptable shortcut. One only needs to take a look at popular magazines such as *Men’s Health*, *Muscular Development* or *Healthy for Men* for abundant proof of the trend that wants shortcuts being an integral part to one being stronger, faster and ‘better looking’ (see, for example, Nicoll, 2014).

This special issue of *Trends in Organized Crime* having ‘Sports, Corruption and Organized Crime’ as its central theme attempts at –directly or indirectly - highlighting a number of issues and problems but also contributing to a fruitful discussion about the topic. The special issue is a result of a number of trends and phenomena: Firstly, the increasing media and political attention on corruption and the supposed involvement of ‘organized crime’ in the world of sports in a variety of ways and on the international level (see The Guardian, 2013; UNODC, 2013). Within this context of increased media and official attention, one can identify the usual ‘organized crime’ rhetoric including a fight between the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’, the conflation of disparate phenomena in order for the ‘threat’ to look (even more) menacing, and the involvement of ‘mafias’ and shady ‘underworld’ figures, who use sport as a money-making and money laundering platform (UNODC, 2013). For instance, on various occasions including the annual *Securing Sport* conference held in London in 2014, the director general of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), David Howman, emphatically noted:

“If you think the mafia and underworld aren’t involved in this country [United Kingdom], you’re in fairyland” (Howman cited in Gibson, 2013: 1)

“I think, now, organized crime controls at least 25 per cent of world sport in one way or another... Those guys who are distributing drugs, steroids and HGH [human growth hormone] and EPO and so on, are the same guys who are corrupting people, the same guys who are paying money to people to fix games. They are the same bad guys. Now, the good guys have to prevail. Who are the good guys? Let’s get them together and make sure they can work out a plan. Because, otherwise, the bad guys are going to win” (Howman in Rumsby, 2014).

Secondly, the special issue is a result of the trend that wants more researchers and authors being interested in the study of sports, corruption, and ‘organized crime’. For example, Declan Hill’s *The Fix* on football/soccer match-fixing and ‘organized crime’ (Hill, 2010) and Paoli and Donati’s (2014) *The Sports Doping Market* (see Barker, this issue) are two remarkable, and extremely interesting and informative pieces of work that paved the way in two of the ways in which sports, corruption and ‘organized crime’ intersect.

Thirdly, the special issue responds in a more structured manner to Haberfeld and Sheehan’s (2013) ‘hope’ that new initiatives for the study of manifestations of sport-related

crime issues are developed, and to a relative scarcity of empirical studies on these issues. As Fincoeur, van de Ven and Mulrooney (this issue) note, for example, and with regards to doping in particular, in a search they conducted in the *Criminal Justice Abstracts* in February 2014, using doping and trafficking/trade/supply as keywords 15 publications were identified; however, only two were relevant for criminologists (and the rest were from the field of forensic science) (see also Paoli, 2012).

Fourthly, the special issue is partly based on the consolidation of an internet-based industry that very efficiently supports both the trade in doping substances (see Hall and Antonopoulos, forthcoming 2015) and the gambling that is very often the rationale for match-fixing (Di Ronco and Lavorgna, this issue). Finally, the special issue is based on the need to theorize the link between sports, corruption and ‘organized crime’, and place it within a wider political economy context.

The contributions

Following this introduction, this special issue comprises four selected peer-reviewed articles, two report excerpts, and two book reviews. *Anna Di Ronco* and *Anita Lavorgna*, in the first article for this special issue, focus on corruption in Italian football in general. Italy is a context which was brought to public attention particularly through a number of scandals such as *Calciopoli* (‘City of Football’) and *Calcio Scommesse* (‘Football Bets’) as well as a number of other scandals some of which involved clans of mafia organizations from the south of the country. The authors use judicial files from the Criminal Chamber of the Italian Supreme Court and media reports (from the two major broadsheet newspapers and the two major sport newspapers) from Italy and attempt at categorizing and describing with detail different types and patterns of corrupt practices in Italian football. The authors’ analysis identifies three main categories of corruptive behaviors: (a) ‘private-to-public corruption’ encompassing cases in which bribes have been given in the form of sponsorship to football clubs and in the form of financial support; (b) ‘financial crimes’, and (c) ‘sportive frauds’, which are defined in the article as frauds perpetrated to obtain a different outcome in football matches (and other sports). Within these three main categories, sub-categories emerge, which Di Ronco and Lavorgna very elaborately describe such as fraudulent bankruptcy, money laundering, illegal betting, doping and match-fixing. Moreover, Di Ronco and Lavorgna examine the findings of their analysis through the prism of subcultural and opportunity theories, and identify systemic opportunities for corruption.

Two of the contributions in this special issue deal with the issue of football match-fixing in particular. *Elisavet Argyro Manoli* and *Georgios A. Antonopoulos* in the second article in this issue, offer an account of the social organization of football match-fixing in Greece.² Greece has relatively recently been identified as one of the hotspots for football match-fixing on an international level. Following the recent scandal exposure of fixed matches in Greece in 2011, also known as *Koriopolis* (a pun name on the Italian scandal *Calciopolis* and the Greek word ‘korios’ or phone-tap), detailed information about numerous matches were brought into the public eye. In their attempt, Manoli and Antonopoulos utilized three main sources of data: the telephone conversations that were the result of wiretapping by the Greek National Intelligence Agency in relation to the latest football match-fixing scandal (2011), published media accounts, and interviews with informed actors from the Greek football industry. The authors describe with detail the actors in the football match-fixing business as well as the process of football match-fixing in Greece. Unlike other accounts

² The review process for this article was managed by the editor-in-chief of *Trends in Organized Crime*, Dr Klaus von Lampe.

from other contexts (e.g. Hill, 2010; see also Di Ronco and Lavorgna, this issue), the authors identify rather simple, horizontal ‘structures’ being involved in match-fixing in Greece, and these ‘structures’ comprise of individuals who many times act on improvisation. Manoli and Antonopoulos also attempt to locate match-fixing in the wider political and economic context of Greece.

In the third contribution, *Declan Hill* answers the question why players, professionals who are purportedly well-paid, adored by the public, and enjoy high social status, agree to fix football matches. In a previous work by the author it was shown that most of the times players are not coerced into match-fixing and other corruptive practices (Hill, 2013); so why do so many football players decide to get involved in football match-fixing? In his effort to answer this question, the author very efficiently uses quantitative and qualitative data, including interviews with football players with a direct experience in football match-fixing, and focuses exclusively on players who are engaged in a particular type of match-fixing, namely, gambling-oriented match-fixing. As Hill suggests in his article, “the best way to understand why some footballers fix matches for gambling corruptors is to see them as economically-motivated criminals who choose to participate in fixing matches for a set of financial reasons”. As he also characteristically notes, “[t]he best societal comparison of footballers is not disadvantaged working class males, but an eclectic mixture between high-level business executives and professional ballet dancers”.

One article in this special issue deals with the issue of doping supply in sports. Specifically, *Bertrand Fincoeur, Katinka van de Ven and Kyle J.D. Mulrooney*, in the fourth article, focus on the symbiotic evolution of anti-doping policy and the supply chains of doping substances within elite cycling, the image of which has been tarnished by numerous scandals with the Lance Armstrong case coming to publicity a few years ago being the most prominent one. In their article, which is part of two, wider projects on the issue of doping and is based on an impressive set of empirical data, the authors attempt at filling the gap of information on the doping supply side. They show how the methods by which Performance and Image Enhancing Drugs (PIEDs) are obtained have shifted away from the cycling teams and into new organizational structures independent from teams and cycling altogether including the black market in doping substances. To a great extent, this is the result or an unintended consequence of a punitive anti-doping policy which pushes the supply chain (as well as the use of doping substances) underground. The authors also urge for a re-evaluation of the anti-doping policy and its effectiveness.

These four articles are followed by two interesting report excerpts. The first is an excerpt from the 124-page report “Match-fixing in sport: A mapping of criminal law provisions in EU 27”. This report is based on a study on criminal law and match-fixing that has been carried out for the *European Commission (Directorate General for Education and Culture) (2012)*. The research was conducted by KEA European Affairs, a Brussels based advisory and research organization specialized in sport and creative industries. Alexandre Husting, María Iglesias, Philippe Kern and Zivile Buinickaite were the main researchers of this study. Additionally, Chantal Cutajar, Noël Pons and Sylvia Schenk have assisted the KEA team with the research. The excerpt contains the sections that deal with the methodology of the study, the working definitions of sporting fraud and match-fixing, and the existing statistical data on match-fixing. Some aspects of the European legal framework against corruption in sports are also focused upon.

The second excerpt is from the 47-page report “Organized Crime and Drugs in Sports: New Generation Performance and Image Enhancing Drugs and Organized Criminal Involvement in their Use in Professional Sports”. This report provides a summary of the findings of a study by the *Australian Crime Commission (2013)*, which was conducted in 2012 with the assistance of the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority (ASADA) on the

extent of use of Performance and Image Enhancing Drugs (PIEDs) by professional athletes, the size of this market and the extent of organized criminal involvement. The excerpt from this report contains the sections that deal with the nature of the ‘threat’ from prohibited substances in sports, the use of PIEDs by professional athletes, the role of sport scientists, coaches and other facilitators, and the role of ‘organized crime’.

The special issue concludes with two book reviews by *Eileen Barker* and *Argyro Elisavet Manoli*. Barker offers a complimentary review of Letizia Paoli and Alessandro Donati’s (2014) *The Sports Doping Market: Understanding Supply and Demand, and the Challenges of Their Control*. According to Barker, the book is a wonderful account with the aim of “analyzing the production and distribution of doping products, and understanding how anti-doping criminal provisions and their enforcement can contribute to the control of doping within and outside the sports world” (p. xxiii). Although the study focuses exclusively on one context that is exceptionally active (though not as effective) with regards to anti-doping, namely Italy, one can very easily see that the book resonates far beyond Italy in terms of both the research findings and the policy implications.

Manoli provides a critical review of Maria Haberfeld and Dale Sheehan’s (2013) *Match-Fixing in International Sports: Existing Processes, Law Enforcement and Prevention Strategies*, a very rich and informative collection on an under-researched topic that has been receiving increased media attention. The collection not only has an impressive international scope but also, as Manoli notes, the number of fixing-related topics covered “and the polyphony of the authors allow the reader to grasp the wide picture of this phenomenon”.

Although, it should be mentioned, this special issue by no means exhausts the number of possibilities of corruption in sports and the involvement of ‘organized crime’, the contributions address the subject of ‘Sports, Corruption and Organized Crime’ from different perspectives, add to the conceptual diversity, and offer numerous interesting insights. Specifically, the authors point to the influence the wider culture of illegality has on the link between sports, corruption, ‘organized crime’ and illegal markets (Hill, this issue). The authors also note the significance of political and economic factors (Manoli and Antonopoulos, this issue), of important country-specific cultural factors (Di Ronco and Lavorgna), links with the political sphere and the corruptive effect this has as well as on the diversity of structures involved in sports-related ‘organized crime’. These structures range from single individuals –very often professionals around health and sports, friends and ‘friends of friends’- (Hill, this issue; Fincoeur, van de Ven and Mulrooney, this issue; see also Antonopoulos *et al.*, 2010), to less robust structures (Manoli and Antonopoulos, this issue) to Mafia organizations (Di Ronco and Lavorgna, this issue; see also Paoli and Donati, 2014).

All authors attest to the fact that the existence of ‘organized crime’, illegal markets and corruption in the world of sport - irrespective of the nature of the structure involved, and its manifestation, commodity or service offered, from illegal gambling to match-fixing to doping- is forged by the enormous neoliberal pressures and forces that have “reshaped institutions and the goals of social actors” (Smith, 2014: 33). Directly or indirectly, the authors highlight the aching vulnerabilities of the sports industry and the peripheral industries. The contributors to this special issue are careful enough and, directly or indirectly, point to the fact that their work probably raises more questions than it answers. It is hoped that this special issue will act as a platform for further discussion and further research based on these questions.

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