

Chapter 4

A MAFIA-LIKE SYSTEM – OR A VICTIM OF GREEDY INDIVIDUALS?

The air in the conference hall at the German Sport University Cologne was thick with tension. The audience at Play the Game 2011 had just heard the British investigative journalist Andrew Jennings explain how FIFA ticked all the boxes of an academic definition of organised crime – a mafia gang.

Then Walter de Gregorio raised his hand and asked for the microphone. As the newly appointed director of communications for FIFA, one of de Gregorio's first decisions was to register for Play the Game 2011 – the first FIFA employee to officially do so, while previous FIFA emissaries had appeared in disguise.

De Gregorio was not amused. Being of Italian descent, he knew what the real mafia was, he said. The mafia killed people, and it was disrespectful both to FIFA and the victims to make such a comparison.

Andrew Jennings was unimpressed: “Tell us how much you earn to defend the crooks at FIFA,” he fired back.

Shortly after FBI charged some FIFA-leaders with organised crime in 2015, The Mob Museum in Las Vegas put these media articles on display. Photo: Ethan Miller/Getty Images

If FIFA had intended to reconcile with its antagonist No. 1, the mission failed. The loud discussion between Jennings and de Gregorio continued in the corridors, and there was no exchange of handshakes to seal any mutual respect.

The conflict mirrors a question that has been floating in the air for many years:

Is FIFA – or other similar sports federations – a corrupt system, a mafia? Or is it the complete opposite: A victim of corruption carried out by individual sports leaders?

Transparency International defines corruption as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain”, and argues that corruption “erodes trust, weakens democracy, hampers economic development, and further exacerbates inequality, poverty, social division and the environmental crisis”. Transparency International adds that “exposing corruption and holding the corrupt to account can only happen if we understand the way corruption works and the systems that enable it.”

The abuse of entrusted power for private gain can happen, Transparency International points out, in “business, government, the courts, the media, and in civil society, as well as across all sectors from health and education to infrastructure and sport,” it can involve “politicians, government officials, public servants, businesspeople, and members of the public”, and it happens in the shadows “often with the help of professional enablers such as bankers, lawyers, accountants and real estate agents, opaque financial systems and anonymous shell companies that allow corruption schemes to flourish and the corrupt to launder and hide their illicit wealth.”

But to the British investigative journalist Andrew Jennings, who died in January 2022 at the age of 78 after having spent most of his life exposing corruption in many forms across different sectors, the definition of corruption was far less complex. When asked by his youngest children what he was doing for a living, Andrew Jennings simply told them: “I’m chasing the bad men.”

Mafia structures

During his lifetime, Andrew Jennings chased more bad men in the world of sport than any other journalist. His work documented how sports leaders for decades have allowed corruption schemes of an enormous scale to flourish without holding the bad men to account. Often because some of the most powerful sports leaders were among the bad men themselves.

In the 1980s, Andrew Jennings was a crime reporter who investigated the Palermo mob in Italy and organised crime. Thanks to a tip from a contact who worked in sports marketing, the investigative journalist “stumbled across two perfect applications of mob structures”, as he liked to label the IOC and FIFA, and began to study the behaviour of the individuals and the companies that run world sport.



Is the system corrupt or a victim of corruption? This question laid beneath a memorable clash in and outside the conference hall between reporter Andrew Jennings (left) and FIFA's communication director Walter de Gregorio at Play the Game 2011. Photo: Tine Harden/Play the Game

In 1992, when Andrew Jennings and Vyv Simson published their book 'The Lords of the Rings' which dealt with abuse of entrusted power in the IOC, they weren't the first reporters to write about corruption in sport. According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, fraudulent activities in the running of sports institutions and competitions have been documented from the times of the Ancient Olympic Games, just as match-fixing cases like the 1919 Black Sox scandal in US baseball and the 1980 Totonero scandal in Italian football have attracted considerable media attention and political scrutiny.

But the British bestseller was one of the first attempts to point out that Olympic corruption is a systemic problem at many levels of sport that needs international scrutiny because of the IOC's global power over Olympic sport.

Because, as Andrew Jennings said at a 1999 US Senate hearing on Olympic corruption, reports of corruption inside the IOC had circulated for decades, but no actions were taken. This hearing was arranged after US media exposure of the Olympic corruption scandal in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Family helps family

In September 1997, The Salt Lake Weekly revealed that the Salt Lake City Organising Committee for the 2002 Olympic Winter Games helped finance scholarships at American universities for children of IOC members.

At first, the news story was met with silence from both the IOC and the public authorities. But one year later, in November 1998, the story became world news when the US TV station KTVX published a letter from Salt Lake City's Olympic boss Dave Johnson to Sonia Essomba, daughter of IOC member Rene Essomba of Cameroun.

The letter documented that Sonia Essomba's scholarship at the American University in Washington, representing a value of 108,000 US dollars, was paid by Salt Lake City's Olympic budget.

Although the organising committee admitted that other IOC members' children were also granted American university scholarships, Tom Welch, a former head of the committee, denied the allegations of corruption by saying "Family helps family" and "That is what the Olympic family is all about."

When the local radio reporter Howard Berkes at the National Public Radio heard Tom Welch's statement, he decided to investigate the matter.

On 9 December 1998, he called the Swiss Marc Hodler, the longest-serving IOC member, president of the International Skiing Federation (FIS) for 47 years, and co-author of the IOC code of conduct. Marc Hodler told the reporter that rumours of corruption had been circulating for years, especially in relation to African IOC members, but that until then he hadn't seen any evidence of the corruption.

Following the radio interview, the 80-year-old IOC member made newspaper headlines all over the world by estimating that 5 to 7 per cent of all IOC members would take bribes in exchange for their votes. The Swiss also declared that a certain amount of corruption had always been involved in IOC elections of Olympic host cities, especially for the Olympic Winter Games, adding that half of the IOC members were not really interested in winter sports, they just asked their wives where they wanted to spend the winter holidays every four years.



The IOC was shaken in its foundation when the longest serving member, skiing president Marc Hodler, in 1998 confirmed media reports on Olympic corruption and estimated that 5 to 7 per cent of IOC members would take money for votes. Photo: Jay Ward/Allsport/Getty Images

In the following months, several investigations of the ‘bad men’ inside the IOC were launched by an IOC commission led by IOC vice president Richard Pound, a US Olympic Committee panel led by the former US senator George Mitchell, the Board of Ethics of the Salt Lake City Organising Committee led by Gordon R. Hall, a former chief justice of the Utah Supreme Court, and the FBI. And the media launched its own investigations too.

Viagra and guns

The media investigations documented that the Salt Lake City bribery of IOC members besides university scholarships included all kinds of lavish gifts from cash payments to medical care and Viagra pills. The media reports exposed that even the IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch had accepted expensive antique guns as gifts, but the Spaniard claimed that he had not kept the guns for himself. They were donated to the Olympic Museum in Lausanne.

In January 1999, when the preliminary findings of the Pound Commission were presented to the IOC Executive Board, the IOC president first tried to control the damage by admitting collective IOC responsibility. He also announced that a possible expulsion of corrupt IOC members was to take place at an extraordinary IOC session in March 1999 where an Olympic reform process would be introduced.

Prior to the session, suspected IOC members such as Pirjo Häggmann of Finland, Bashir Mohamed Attarabulsi of Libya, and Charles Mukora of Kenya, all retired voluntarily. When he opened the session, IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch described it as “the most important” in IOC history, adding that the IOC must root out “all forms of inappropriate or unethical behaviour among our membership” and take the necessary steps to be certain that “this very sad episode” never happens again.

“It is my firm conviction that, unless we act quickly, decisively, and unanimously, the damage which may be done to the Olympic movement and to the IOC as a result of recent disclosures will be very, very serious,” the Spaniard said.

At the session, the IOC then decided to expel six members based on the Pound Commission’s recommendations. Agustin Arroyo of Ecuador, Zein El Abdin Ahmed Abdel Gadir of Sudan, Jean-Claude Ganga of the Congo Republic, Lamine Keita of Mali, Sergio Santander of Chile, and Paul Wallwork of Samoa were the first ‘bad men’ to be kicked out of the IOC for corruption in 105 years.

Other IOC members had been investigated too but were given only warnings. These included Philip Coles of Australia, Louis Guirandou-N'Diaye of The Ivory Coast, Willi Kaltschmitt Lujan of Guatemala, Kim Un-Young of South Korea, Shagdarjav Magvan of Mongolia, Anani Matthia of Togo, Vitaly Smirnov of Russia, and Mohamed Zerguini of Algeria.

The Salt Lake City scandal shook the world and became an international media scandal. Only two years later, Tom Welch, a former Mormon bishop who led the American bid for the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City accused the IOC of turning a blind eye



Not only the closing ceremony of the 2002 Winter Olympics was colourful. The bidding process provoked public outrage and political turmoil, when it was revealed that the host Salt Lake City had bribed IOC members to secure to secure the hosting of the games. Photo: Smiley N. Pool/Houston Chronicle/Getty Images.

to Olympic corruption. In an exclusive interview with the Observer Sport Monthly in January 2002, Tom Welch alleged that as many as 100 out of 126 IOC members accepted lavish hospitality and gifts.

“If what those expelled members did was wrong and everyone else on the IOC was to be judged by the same standards, then probably 80 per cent should have been kicked

out,” Tom Welch said, stating that those were the people who were “imposing themselves on you, asking for things and pushing for lavish hospitality”, expecting to be treated “like lords”.

In the interview, both Tom Welch and David Johnson, his former colleague on the bid committee, said they were just doing what other cities in the Olympic bid process had been doing for years.

“There were 12 cities lobbying for the same hundred people. We found out that, within the window of just one year, a total of 100 million US dollars was spent on those people. Salt Lake City was not alone in what it did,” David Johnson said, while Tom Welch acknowledged that they broke the IOC rules:

“Sure, you violated the IOC guidelines, but otherwise it would be like playing a game of basketball when the other side is allowed to hand-check (foul) and you are out. That would be an unfair disadvantage.”

50 IOC reforms

And there were indeed questions raised in other countries. According to Japanese media reports, Nagano spent an average of 22,000 US dollars on 62 IOC members who visited the city prior to the



Following his dismissal from FIFA, Michel Zen-Ruffinen shared experiences from a career in sports governance at Play the Game 2005 in Copenhagen. Photo: Niels Nyholm/Play the Game

vote that secured its hosting of the 1998 Olympic Winter Games. But the Japanese bid committee claimed it had destroyed all records of the bid which prevented further investigations of the allegations.

An investigation of the Sydney bid for the 2000 Olympics produced by Tom Sheridan, a former auditor general for Australia, mentioned several breaches of guidelines related to gift giving to IOC members, including trips to European sporting events given to IOC member Niels Holst-Sørensen of Denmark and Kevin O’Flanagan of Ireland. But the Sheridan Report was accused by Australian media of being too soft on the bid committee.

Nevertheless, the numerous investigations of Olympic corruption indicated that the abuse by IOC members of their entrusted power for private gain had been a part of the Olympic culture at least since the 1980s when lucrative sponsor and television contracts rescued the IOC from bankruptcy and made the Olympic Games a profitable global business. The investigations resulted in two new IOC commissions: the Ethics Commission and the IOC 2000 Commission.

The Ethics Commission was given the task of overseeing the selection process of future host cities. The IOC 2000 Commission was responsible for reforming the structure of the Olympic Movement to prevent new ethical breaches. The Ethics Commission produced an IOC Code of Ethics, and the IOC 2000 Commission made 50 recommendations to reform the IOC which were approved at an IOC session in December 1999 and led to a major re-writing of the Olympic Charter.

However, the IOC Ethics Commission has never acquired operational independence and today still depends on decisions from the top of the IOC. And the reforms did not put an end to corruption in the Olympic family.

A whistleblower at FIFA’s top

A few years later, in May 2002, FIFA general secretary Michel Zen-Ruffinen presented an explosive confidential report to the members of FIFA’s Executive Committee. The report made Michel Zen-Ruffinen one of the highest-ranking whistleblowers in sport.

On the eve of FIFA’s 2002 presidential election, the report alleged that Sepp Blatter, FIFA president since 1998 and an IOC member, ran the international football association like a dictator allowing widespread corruption and mismanagement of FIFA funds to flourish to ensure continued support from national football leaders around the world.

Michel Zen-Ruffinen highlighted in detail the relationship between Sepp Blatter and Jack Warner of Trinidad and Tobago, a FIFA vice president and president of 35 football nations in the North and Central American and Caribbean Football Association CONCACAF. According to Zen-Ruffinen, Sepp Blatter had “constantly taken decisions which are favourable to the economic interests of Jack Warner and some of his family members, and thus are contrary to the financial interests of FIFA.”



The Brazilian football president Ricardo Teixeira was long known to be among the most greedy bribe takers at FIFA where he had a seat on the Executive Committee. Here he is nevertheless embraced by the then FIFA secretary general Jérôme Valcke during an inspection visit to Brazil in 2010. Photo: Buda Mendes/LatinContent/Getty Images

Although 11 of FIFA's 24 Executive Committee members asked the Swiss police to investigate the allegations, the Swiss prosecutor Urs Hubmann dismissed the case in December 2002, saying that asking for an investigation of the allegations was certainly justified but that he couldn't justify bringing the case to court because of insufficient evidence against Sepp Blatter.

But by then, the Swiss FIFA president and IOC member was already involved in another Swiss court case. Even though the case didn't deal with corruption, because corruption was not a criminal offence in Switzerland at the time, the case turned out to reveal the largest corruption system ever seen in sport.

It started in May 2001 when the Swiss sports marketing company International Sport and Leisure (ISL), established in 1982 by former Adidas owner Horst Dassler, went into liquidation owing more than 450 million euro to creditors.

The collapse of the Lucerne-based company which for three decades had been the most important marketing partner for sport with multi-billion-dollar contracts from the IOC, FIFA, IAAF, and other federations, was enough to attract the attention of three particularly observant journalists.

Asking for black money back

When FIFA shortly after the ISL collapse brought forward a criminal complaint against the executives of the company, Andrew Jennings began to investigate the case in cooperation with the two German journalists, Jens Weinreich and Thomas Kistner.

By then, the two Germans had already published exclusive documents illustrating how the ISL had been able to secure some of the largest TV and sponsor deals at the time for the FIFA World Cup 2002 and 2006. Six weeks after the ISL collapse, the three journalists knew they were heading in the right direction when Andrew Jennings at the first creditor's meeting in Zug asked the ISL liquidator Thomas Bauer if any evidence of black money was found.

"Yes, I have sent legal letters asking for it back," Bauer confirmed.

In 2002, Thomas Bauer wrote to several football officials and threatened to sue them if they didn't return the black money that ISL had paid them in exchange for television and marketing contracts.

And one year later, the ISL liquidator opened civil complaints against approximately 20 sports officials, only to withdraw them again in 2004 when 2,5 million Swiss francs were transferred to the liquidator's account.

Yet, it took years before the journalists were able to publish the real scale of the corruption. As bribery was not a crime at the time, the names involved in the case were kept secret by the court.

In order to put a lid on the case, FIFA tried in 2004 to withdraw its criminal complaint against the former ISL executives, but Thomas Hildebrand, the magistrate in charge, went on investigating the case for four more years.

When the Swiss journalist Jean Francois Tanda reported in 2005 that a judgement by the Swiss Federal Court mentioned bribes, FIFA, and Sepp Blatter's personal lawyer Peter Nobel, it became clear that the FIFA president somehow was involved in the case.

A turning point came in March 2008, when six former executives of ISL and its parent group ISMM went on trial in the Swiss canton of Zug.

Jennings, Kistner and Weinreich were among the few journalists in court and could hardly believe what they heard. The top leaders confirmed that ISL paid at least 138 million Swiss francs (later confirmed as at least 142 million Swiss francs, more than 100 million US dollars) between 1989 and 2001.

Although the six executives denied charges of fraud, embezzlement, fraudulent bankruptcy, damaging creditors, and falsification of documents, three of them were found guilty in some of the charges when the court verdict in the case was published in July 2008.

The bagman

The most important of them all was Jean-Marie Weber, an assistant to Horst Dassler and a longtime friend of Sepp Blatter. He was often referred to as The Bagman because he carried cash for sports leaders around the world in his suitcase.

Weber was fined for embezzlement. A discreet and friendly nobleman also to his critics, Weber was later ostracized by the IOC. He never sought revenge and took his secrets about many top leaders in world sport with him to his grave in 2018.

The Swiss court also ordered FIFA to pay 118,000 Swiss francs in costs for lodging the criminal complaint that sparked the fraud inquiry in 2001. But except for Nicolás Leoz of Paraguay, the president of the South American football association CONMEBOL, the

court didn't reveal any names of the sports leaders who got rich from the corruption scheme.

In a presentation of the ISL bribery system that Jens Weinreich gave in 2009 at Play the Game's sixth conference in the British city of Coventry, the German journalist noted that ISL held long-time contracts worth billions of dollars with FIFA and the IOC as well as a long list of other sports organisations in charge of football, athletics, basketball, swimming, auto racing, and tennis and that the key for getting and holding these contracts was "a gigantic bribery system". But although Jens Weinreich had a list of some of the recipients of ISL payments, most of the involved sports leaders were still held secret.

"We can find individuals and companies. But it is only a small number of all recipients. We still don't know more than 80 per cent of the bribe takers," Jens Weinreich said and added that an investigation by his Swiss colleague Jean-François Tanda had revealed that a company named Renford Investments was among the recipients of ISL payments.

The company was owned by Ricardo Teixeira, president of the Brazilian Football Federation (CBF) and head of the organising committee for the World Cup 2014, and his former father-in-law João Havelange, FIFA president from 1974 to 1998 and an IOC member since 1963.

In 2010, Andrew Jennings also named IOC member and FIFA vice president Issa Hayatou of Cameroon among the ISL bribe takers in the BBC Panorama documentary 'FIFA's Dirty Secrets', which put more public pressure on FIFA to publish all names involved.

FIFA never gave in, but following legal action by Tanda, the federal court in Switzerland ordered the release of the documents in the ISL case. The documents confirmed that former FIFA president João Havelange and his former son-in-law Ricardo Teixeira together cashed in between 14 and 22 million Swiss francs in bribes from the ISL.

Even today, we do not know in which private pockets the majority of the ISL bribes ended up. And the media, in general, did not show much interest, neither before, during, or after the revelation of what many believed to be the greatest corruption scheme ever in sport.

Which turned out to be wrong.

The raid on the FIFA congress

Most FIFA observers, even the most critical ones, were taken by surprise on 27 May 2015 when the FBI and the Swiss police raided the luxurious Baur au Lac Hotel in Zürich in the

early morning hours shortly before the FIFA congress. Seven FIFA officials were arrested and faced extradition to the US.

The raid was a result of FBI investigations that raised charges against more than 40 football and sports business leaders around the world and involved more than 150 million US dollars in bribes – an amount that would later be almost doubled.

Many of the football officials were later given prison sentences in court cases in the US.

The FBI investigation had begun in secret in 2009 when the numerous media reports, books, and documentaries on FIFA corruption led agents of the bureau to contact Andrew Jennings and ask for his help in documenting possible US-related football crimes.

The FBI and the IRS placed Chuck Blazer, executive vice president of US Soccer and secretary general of CONCACAF, the North American and Caribbean Football Confederation, at the centre of the investigation. The authorities had gathered so much evidence of Chuck Blazer's unpaid taxes and hidden incomes from football that they were able to persuade him to help investigate other football officials as an undercover informant.

In the hope of avoiding a serious charge of racketeering, which could put him in prison for decades, Chuck Blazer pleaded guilty to money laundering, wire fraud, and tax crimes. In exchange, he agreed to secretly record meetings with FIFA executives and hand over the recordings to the FBI. At the London 2012 Olympics for instance, Blazer placed a keyhanger with a built-in microphone on the table when meeting his peers.

While Chuck Blazer was working as an undercover informant for the FBI, the media reports of the bad men in world football escalated too, causing FIFA to launch several internal investigations. Ironically, one of them was kicked off by Chuck Blazer before he knew he himself was a target of an investigation.

In May 2011, Chuck Blazer initiated an investigation of corruption involving his long-standing collaborator and president in CONCACAF, FIFA vice president Jack Warner of Trinidad and Tobago, as well as Mohammed bin Hammam, a Qatari football administrator and president of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), who was running to replace the sitting FIFA president Sepp Blatter.

It was proven that Warner had arranged a meeting for Caribbean football presidents to which Mohammed bin Hammam had brought a suitcase with one million US dollars and distributed them generously. Both were suspended by FIFA and later given lifetime bans from football.



At the FIFA Congress in 2011, Chuck Blazer was portrayed as a whistleblower revealing corruption among his peers. He was soon to face serious criminal charges himself by the FBI and IRS, and to reduce his penalty he decided to become an undercover informant. Photo: Julian Finney/Getty Images

The kingmaker from Kuwait

Although Sepp Blatter had been accused of corruption ever since he became FIFA president in 1998, the Swiss denied any wrongdoing and managed to avoid being arrested. Following the police raid in Zürich, he was re-elected FIFA president for a fourth time.

However, it took only a few days before Sepp Blatter on 2 June 2015 bowed to the pressure and announced he would resign and call an extraordinary FIFA congress to elect his successor.

But Blatter did not last that long. In September 2015, the Swiss attorney general launched a criminal investigation against him, and in December 2015, Sepp Blatter was banned from football for eight years by FIFA. The ban was later reduced to six years.

But there were more targets for the judiciary in the Olympic movement.

In 2017, following bribery allegations at the FIFA trials in the US, Sheikh Ahmad Al Fahad Al Sabah of Kuwait, a long-time member of both FIFA and the IOC, resigned from his football positions and later 'self-suspended' from his position in the IOC.



A close relation that did not last – Sheikh Ahmad Al Sabah helped Thomas Bach become IOC president. The sheikh's shady manoeuvres were largely tolerated until July 2023. Photo: Mark Rummales/Getty Images

The sheikh, known as ‘The Kingmaker’ thanks to his support for IOC president Thomas Bach’s election and that of many other influential sports leaders, was identified as a conspirator in the FIFA corruption case by Richard Lai, a FIFA official from Guam and a US citizen. Facing financial conspiracy charges in the US federal court, Richard Lai admitted to taking bribes from a Kuwaiti faction that wanted to buy influence and votes in Asian and world football.

In September 2021, the Associated Press revealed that the US embassy in Kuwait had made a formal request to local authorities to secure evidence of sports-related corruption against several Kuwaiti citizens, including Sheikh Al Sabah and Hussain al-Musallam, the president of swimming’s international governing body FINA and director general of the Olympic Council of Asia where the sheikh is president.

A few days later, the powerful sheikh, who was also the head of the Olympic Solidarity Foundation that distributes hundreds of million dollars, was found guilty of forgery by a Swiss court and sentenced to at least 13 months in prison in a spectacular case concerning the creation of fake videos to prove that two Kuwaiti government officials were guilty of coup-plotting and corruption.

Suspending himself from all important positions in sport did not stop the sheikh from peddling influence. He was active on the sideline of several important sports political events. After getting his brother, Sheikh Talal Fahad Al Ahmad Al-Sabah, elected OCA president in July 2023 in a narrow win over his former wingman Hussain Al-Mussalam, the IOC and Thomas Bach had enough and put a ban on the sheikh for three years.

This should prevent Al-Sabah from influencing the IOC’s own presidential election in 2025 when Thomas Bach’s last term is set to expire according to the Olympic Charter. However, Al-Sabah may not surrender. In his home country, he has made a comeback in 2023 as deputy prime minister and minister of defence.

From these positions, he has access to endless resources of the kind that has proved so effective in impacting international sport, where many remain loyal to a trusted Olympic partner for more than 30 years.



It was a mystery to many how Qatar could win the right to host the FIFA World Cup, but since 2010 numerous corruption allegations have come up and paint a dubious picture of the process. Photo: Ulmer/vullstein bild/Getty Images

The emir of Qatar

So far, the Kuwaiti sheikh has denied any wrongdoing, and so has Qatar's Emir Tamim Bin-Hamad Al-Thani, an IOC member since 2002. Ever since the FIFA World Cup vote in December 2010, the Emir has been suspected of bribing members of FIFA's executive committee to secure Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup. But in April 2020, the US Department of Justice for the first time made formal allegations regarding both the 2022 World Cup and the 2018 World Cup hosted by Russia.

According to the US prosecutors, representatives working for Qatar and Russia bribed FIFA members who took part in the 2010 vote. The indictment stated that at least three South American members of FIFA's executive committee, including Ricardo Teixeira of Brazil and Nicolas Leoz of Paraguay, took bribes to vote for Qatar, and that former FIFA vice president Jack Warner of Trinidad and Tobago was paid 5 million US dollars through various shell companies to vote for Russia.

The whistleblower Phaedra Almajid, a former employee at the Qatar bid for the World Cup, alleged in 2011 that African FIFA officials were paid 1.5 million US dollars by Qatar in exchange for their votes, but later she withdrew her claims stating they were fabricated because she was fired from the bid team.

However, many suspected her withdrawal was made under pressure, and in a Netflix documentary 'FIFA Uncovered' from 2022, she repeated that she witnessed bribes being paid from Qatari officials to African football officials.

But in 2014, several media reports indicated that the Qatari Mohammed bin Hammam, then president of the Asian Football Federation, had paid more than 5 million US dollars to FIFA officials to secure Qatar's bid. In 2019, the Australian whistleblower Bonita Merisiades, a former employee at Australia's 2022 World Cup bid, claimed that Qatar's state-run media company Al Jazeera secretly agreed to pay FIFA an extra broadcasting bonus of 100 million US dollars if Qatar won the 2010 vote.

Leaked documents obtained by The Sunday Times confirmed the existence of such a contract, alleging that the total amount offered by Qatar to FIFA – including the bonus – was 880 million US dollars.

Qatar denied the allegations

In June 2019, the former FIFA executive member and UEFA president Michel Platini, who voted for Qatar, was detained by the police in an ongoing French investigation and questioned about a lunch that he had on 23 October 2010, less than two weeks prior to the FIFA vote at the French Presidential Palace L'Elysée, with the then president Nicolas Sarkozy and Qatar's then Crown Prince (now Emir), Tamim Bin-Hamad Al-Thani.

When the lunch became public knowledge, Sepp Blatter stated that Michel Platini after the lunch told him that he would change his FIFA vote from the US to Qatar. But even



Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy (left) secured the Qatari takeover of Paris Saint-Germain by convincing UEFA President Michel Platini to vote for Qatar. Here Sarkozy is on the home turf whispering to Paris Saint-Germain's Qatari president Nasser Al-Khelaifi who wields much power in European football.

Photo: Mustafa Yalcin/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

though Michel Platini said he knew that Nicolas Sarkozy wanted the people from Qatar to buy his favourite football club, Paris Saint-Germain, because the club was in decline and had financial difficulties, the former French football star denied that he changed his mind because of the lunch.

“I understood that Sarkozy supported the candidature of Qatar. But he never asked me to vote for Russia. He knows my personality. I always vote for what is good for football. Not for myself, not for France,” Michael Platini told *The Guardian* in 2013.

Nevertheless, in 2011, one year after the controversial FIFA vote, Qatar bought Paris Saint-Germain and 50 French aeroplanes made by the Airbus factory in Toulouse. Al Jazeera spent hundreds of millions of euro on football rights deals in France. And one year later, Michel Platini's son, Laurent, joined the Qatar sportswear company Burrda, owned by Qatar Sports Investments, as the chief executive.

Michel Platini and Sepp Blatter are banned from football by FIFA because of a case of corruption involving a FIFA payment of 2 million Swiss francs to Michel Platini in 2011, at a point in time when Platini was expected to challenge Blatter at the FIFA presidential elections. The two claim, however, that the payment concerns work that Michel Platini carried out for Sepp Blatter between 1998 and 2002 during Blatter's first period as FIFA president.

In July 2022, following a Swiss criminal investigation that was opened in 2015 after Sepp

Blatter stepped down as president of FIFA, both men were cleared of fraud in a Swiss court, but the decision was appealed by federal prosecutors and the case is still pending.

The KGB agents

Russia, the 2018 FIFA World Cup host, has been accused of sports corruption ever since the country was a part of the Soviet Union. Many of the allegations are centred around Vitaly Smirnov, a Russian minister of sports from 1981 to 1990 and an IOC member from 1971 to 2015, who also has a past as president of the Russian Olympic Committee and head of the organising committee for the Olympic Games in Moscow in 1980.

The Russian historian Yuri Felshtinsky and the former KGB agent Vladimir Popov published two books in 2008 and 2009, 'The Corporation: Russia and the KGB in the Age of President Putin' and 'The KGB Plays Chess', where they stated that the former IOC president Samaranch was recruited as a KGB agent in the late 1970s when serving as the Spanish ambassador to Russia. They also named Vitaly Smirnov as a KGB agent.

During the Salt Lake City scandal, Vitaly Smirnov was given a warning by the IOC following allegations that he arranged for a former Russian ice hockey player to receive free medical care at a Salt Lake City hospital, that he received a Browning rifle as a gift exceeding the allowed limit, and that he helped a Russian student to obtain a scholarship from the Salt Lake City Bid Committee to the University of Utah.

In 2007, when Russia won the right to host the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi in 2014, Vitaly Smirnov allegedly also played a role in the bid process that has been suspected of being corrupt ever since. For decades, the German investigative journalist Jens Weinreich has tried to interview Vitaly Smirnov about the allegations, but the Russian has denied answering questions about his more than 50 years in Russian sports politics.

When FIFA asked US lawyer Michael Garcia in 2012 to investigate the successful Russian World Cup bid, the Russians declared they would cooperate. However, all the computers used in the process had been externally leased and delivered back, and all data was erased.

When Russia was accused in 2020 by the US Department of Justice of being involved in the FIFA World Cup corruption case, Alexei Sorokin, the CEO of the organising committee for Russia's 2018 World Cup, stated:

“This is only an opinion of lawyers. We have repeatedly said that our bid was transparent. At the time we answered all questions, including from the investigation branch of FIFA and from the media, we handed over all needed documents. We have nothing to add to this and we will not respond to attempts to cast a shadow on our bid.”



Carlos Nuzman (with sunglasses), IOC member and head of the Rio 2016 Games, was sentenced to more than 30 years in jail for corruption related to the bidding process. Here police escorts Nuzman to an interrogation.

Photo: Fabio Teixeira/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Operation Unfair Play

The many recent cases of corruption involving FIFA could indicate that the public interest in investigating corruption in sport for the past decade has been limited to football. But parallel to the FIFA investigations, the abuse of entrusted power for private gain has been exposed across many sports, involving sports leaders in boxing, volleyball, weightlifting, swimming, and others.

And 25 years after the Salt Lake City scandal, corruption still seems to flourish at the highest level in the Olympic Movement. In November 2021, Carlos Nuzman, a former IOC member and president of the Brazilian Olympic Committee, was sentenced to 30 years and 11 months in jail for buying IOC votes to secure Rio de Janeiro's hosting of the 2016 Olympic Games. In a federal court in Rio de Janeiro, Carlos Nuzman was found guilty of corruption, money laundering and tax evasion. At the trial, former Rio de Janeiro governor Sergio Cabral and Leonardo Gryner, a former director general of the Rio Games, were also sentenced to prison.

One year after the Rio Games, Carlos Nuzman was arrested in October 2017 as part of an investigation called 'Operation Unfair Play'. The operation was launched after the French newspaper Le Monde investigated former IAAF president Lamine Diack and his son Papa Massata Diack's involvement in the Russian case of state-sponsored doping and came across another story. Le Monde alleged that IOC members including Lamine Diack had been bribed a few days prior to the Olympic host city vote at the IOC session in Copenhagen in 2009 when Rio de Janeiro beat Tokyo, Madrid, and Chicago.

Already serving a 200-year prison sentence for fraud and corruption, Sergio Cabral told the Brazilian criminal judge Marcelo Bretas that the bribery scheme to bring the Olympic Games to South America for the first time in history was set up by Carlos Nuzman and Papa Massata Diack, and that he was approached by Carlos Nuzman a few months before the IOC vote was to take place in Copenhagen.

"Nuzman came to me and said: Sergio, I want to tell you that the IAAF president, Lamine Diack, is a person that is open to undue advantages. He can secure five or six votes. In exchange, he wants 1.5 million dollars."

16 kilos of gold

The former Brazilian governor said he then paid 2 million US dollars in exchange for up to six votes for Rio de Janeiro, adding that he later paid Papa Massata Diack another 500,000 US dollars to secure three more votes and that the money came from a debt owed to him by the Brazilian businessman Arthur Soares known as ‘King Arthur’.

According to Sergio Cabral’s testimony, both the then Brazilian president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and then Rio de Janeiro mayor, Eduardo Paes, were aware of the Olympic bribes, but neither of them were directly involved in the scheme.

Sergio Cabral also named the Ukrainian IOC member Sergey Bubka and the Russian IOC member Aleksandr Popov among those who received the Brazilian bribes. The two former Olympic athletes have denied the allegations, but a third Olympic athlete and IOC member, Frank Fredericks of Namibia, has been charged in the French part of the case.

According to Marcelo Bretas, the former volleyball player and Olympic athlete, Carlos Nuzman, was “the main creator of the illicit scheme”. Carlos Nuzman had been “taking advantage of the high position achieved over 22 years as president of the Brazilian Olympic Committee”, and that’s why “his conduct must be valued more rigorously than that of any corrupt person,” the judge said.

“The convict dedicated his public career to making Rio de Janeiro the host city for the Olympic Games, however, despite such social responsibility, he chose to act against morality and public property,” Marcelo Bretas noted.

During the investigation, the Brazilian police found that Carlos Nuzman had hidden and concealed the origin and ownership of 16 kilos of gold worth 270,000 US dollars in a safe in Switzerland. But it was his dirty deals with the Diack family that brought the Brazilian to a fall and led to the opening of new public investigations of Olympic corruption in other countries, too. So far, the Diack family has been linked to corruption involving Tokyo’s bid to host the 2020 Olympic Games.

Overall, the recent examples of Olympic bribes indicate a culture of corruption in the Olympic Movement that except for the rising costs of IOC bribes hasn’t changed much since the Salt Lake City corruption scandal 25 years ago.

The first UN report

In December 2021, the culture of corruption in sport led the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to release the first-ever UN global report on the ‘bad men’ in sport who abuse their entrusted power for private gain. With references to many of the cases of corruption highlighted above, the report ‘Evolutions in Sport Related to Corruption’ concluded:

“The risk of corruption has grown alongside the globalization of sport. While the evolution of sport has been positive in many respects, it has also brought with it complex corruption risks that combine general risks, common to many different sectors, with sport-specific risks. For example, the Bochum match-fixing scandal included criminal infiltration of a football club, money laundering and competition manipulation.”

But although the Salt Lake City scandal 25 years ago documented the need for more public scrutiny of Olympic sport, and the many well-documented cases of FIFA corruption since then have confirmed the need for better public control over sport, the UN report also concluded:

“Public authorities have only recently displayed interest in regulating against corruption in sport. The strategy of infiltrating organisations used by organised criminal groups to target sports entities poses a threat that States can no longer ignore. But corruption in sport cannot be considered as a purely exogenous threat. What has also attracted public scrutiny is the reach, scale, and complexity of criminal networks within sport. Because these networks involve influential sport actors and institutions, because they stem from internal governance and compliance shortcomings, and because they undermine the trust in the sector, corruption in sport has become a subject of public interest.”

A quarter of a century after the Salt Lake City scandal, the UN had joined the game.



ISL: The (once) biggest corruption scheme in sport

Since the 2000 conference, journalists like Andrew Jennings, Thomas Kistner, and Ezequiel Fernández Moores have documented the widespread corruption in and around sport, especially in FIFA. The response from the Olympic family was denial, threats, or silence. But by the end of the first decade of the century, cracks in the glossy picture of sports business began to spread.

At Play the Game 2009 in Coventry, UK, German investigative journalist Jens Weinreich described the systemic corruption organised by the most powerful sports marketing company to benefit some of the most powerful people in sport. This was documented in a Swiss court case in March 2008, when directors of the International Sport and Leisure (ISL) company were charged with embezzlement and other types of financial crime. The directors were not charged with corruption for reasons explained below. So they were free to give testimonies and confirm evidence of what was at the time the biggest corruption scheme in Olympic sport. This is part of Jens Weinreich's speech in 2009:

This is the verdict – 179 pages. The charge was 228 pages. The problem is ironic:

According to Swiss law, I am not allowed to show you all the details of these documents. On the other hand: According to Swiss law it was allowed to pay at least 138 million CHF to high-ranking sports officials.

In legal terms: bribery was not a crime in Switzerland at that time.

The ISL system of paying sports officials was worked out – as it came out during the court hearings – together with KPMG, some of the most famous law firms in Zurich and was officially permitted by the Swiss Tax Authorities. [...]

An impressive number of sports officials and assistants, who have worked for Horst Dassler, for Adidas and the ISL company, and who were created and brought into their positions by the visionary Dassler, are still in their positions in the Olympic world: as presidents of international federations, as IOC members, as so-called consultants, or – much clearer – as bagmen. One of Dassler's closest assistants was Jean-Marie Weber. The French-born Weber was always described as The Bagman.

What we got to know at last during the trial in the spring of 2008: Jean-Marie Weber was the man who paid at least 138 million CHF to high-ranking sports officials in the Olympic world between 1989 and 2001.



Photo: Jens Astrup/Play the Game

After Dassler's early death in 1987, Weber became one of the top managers of the ISL group. The group was united under the ISMM umbrella in 2001 when the marketing giant collapsed because of mismanagement, greed and megalomania. It was the second biggest collapse in Swiss economy after the Swiss Air crash.

Jean-Marie Weber was always the bagman – until the bitter end. But it took decades to prove that description. It is now proven. It is now documented in several court files. [...]

Here are some important questions – and preliminary answers:

Who got the money – the *Schmiergeld*, as they used to say in the German-speaking part of Switzerland?

Only Jean-Marie Weber knows who got it.

How much money did ISL pay in the 1980s? One can only estimate it.

How much money was really paid to sports officials over more than 20 years – not only over a period of 12 years? One can just estimate it.

How much money have ISL's opponents paid all those other marketing companies in the huge market? Same answer: One can only estimate it.

How did the international federations, how did the IOC, how did the so-called Ethics Commissions react after the ISL trial?

Short answer: There was no action at all. I have asked several senior officials. I do not know any reaction which I have to take seriously. No investigations at all. [...]

Who got the money?

One important question: Who got the money? The answer is simple: Senior officials of the contractual partners of ISL.

Five of the defendants claimed they had no idea who got bribes. They claimed fellow director Jean-Marie Weber organised the payments. He laundered them through foundations in tax heavens and a British Virgin Islands company (and many others), which distributed the money to companies and individuals. Most of the money was given in cash. [...]

Weber has always refused to identify recipients, telling the Swiss court authorities: These payments were confidential, and I must respect that confidentiality. [...]

Christoph Malms, former chief executive, said that after joining ISL in the 1990s he was shocked to discover the business was built on bribes.

“I was told the company would not have existed if it had not made such payments,” Malms testified.

“I was always told they went to well-known decision-makers in the world of sports politics.”

Malms said kickbacks were usual in the sports marketing and sports political business worldwide. It was the style of the business. They have used terms like “provisions”, “finder fees” or even “salaries”.

Hans-Juerg Schmid, former head of finances, said during the court hearing:

“If we hadn’t made the payments, the other parties wouldn’t have signed the contracts.”

“It was like paying salaries. Otherwise [high-ranking sports officials] would have stopped working immediately!”

“The other side doesn’t want to be named, that is the very sensitive aspect of this business.”

During the hearing, Malms’ lawyer Werner Würgler desperately attacked two FIFA presidents and IOC members: Blatter and Havelange.

Würgler claimed that Joseph Blatter, back then general secretary and now president, had approached his client Malms and told him that if ISL wanted to keep FIFA’s business, Jean-Marie Weber would have to stay in his positions in the company. If not, “it would be bad for ISL.” Würgler also said that during the World Cup in France in 1998 the outgoing president João Havelange made the same demand.

Würgler described the situation as follows: Anybody at FIFA who knew about the bribes and who was getting *Schmiergeld* could exercise great power over fellow officials. Würgler said: ISL became a private source of money for FIFA officials, virtually something like their private bank.

There are numerous well-documented, strange operations within FIFA.

In their decision, the three judges in Zug stated that FIFA “knew more than they told investigators”, that the behaviour of FIFA officials “were not always in good faith”, and that some of their claims “were not credible”. [...]

Payments were lawful

In the ISL case, FIFA was ordered to pay a part of the trial costs, despite claiming not to have misled the authorities.

We have got astonishing documentation of a huge bribery system. Some experts are saying: This is the biggest bribery system in Olympic sports ever. But nobody in the sporting world has taken any action. Not even against senior officials who were mentioned in the court documents.

Who should have taken action: Sepp Blatter? Havelange? IOC president Jacques Rogge?

By the way: Have I mentioned that Jean-Marie is still a member of the family? He is working with IOC members like Lamine Diack (president of the IAAF) and Issa Hayatou (vice president of FIFA and president of CAF).

As I said before: From a strictly juridical point of view, the ISL payments were in accordance with the former Swiss law. But the payments were never in accordance with the rules of sports federations and organisations.

Olympic sports organisations are always arguing that their moral and ethical rules have to be much higher and harder than other rules. The ISL bribery case appears to be a strange example of the extremely high standard in the Olympic family.

Full text at www.jensweinreich.de. Jean-Marie Weber died in 2018 and never revealed his secrets. Lamine Diack died in 2021 while serving a prison sentence for corruption.

Sport needs a watchdog with teeth



Experts in sports corruption would like to see more situations like this where the FBI raided the headquarters of CONCACAF in Miami Beach, Florida. Photo: Joe Skipper/Getty Images

“If we do not act on sports corruption, sports leaders may soon say with nostalgia to each other: Do you remember the time when it was doping that undermined our values... yes, those were happy days!”

These words fell in September 2006, when Play the Game was invited to speak at a high-level conference for the first time. At the ‘Play Fair with Sport’ conference in Strasbourg, organised by the Council of Europe and UEFA, Play the Game’s international director Jens Sejer Andersen pointed to a growing number of cases of match-fixing, crime and corruption in sport.

“Every day it becomes increasingly clear that corruption in sport is not only a matter of individual greed but closely related to the way the entire sports system functions,” Andersen said and proposed an international agency to coordinate the fight against all forms of crime and corruption in sport.

The proposal was met with a deafening silence at the conference, and over the years the idea has mostly faced resistance among sports leaders and public officials alike.

However, when a panel on such an integrity agency discussed the proposal 16 years later at Play the Game 2022, the tone was impatient. Experts in the panel and among the audience almost demanded that Play the Game should take action.

As one of the experts put it: “A systemic failure requires a system change.”

“We cannot wait for public organisations or sports organisations to do it,” said Drago Kos, chairman of the OECD Working Group on Bribery.

“I see that Play the Game is the environment where this could happen. We need to develop a first draft to convince governments. I am absolutely convinced we can do it.”

Inspired by that call, Play the Game allied itself with German investigative journalist Grit Hartmann who had already produced the report ‘Red Card for Corruption in Sports’ on behalf of the German member of the European Parliament, Viola von Cramon (Green Party).

In early 2023, Play the Game sent out a questionnaire to 251 of the best minds dealing with sports politics – experts and stakeholders alike. This was only the first step in an open consultation process.

Play the Game did not ask whether such an agency was needed, but rather how its inception could be pushed forward and how it should be designed and set up to work effectively.

Play the Game asked mainly about:

- How an agency to hold individuals and organisations accountable and to protect the victims could be set up
- The best path towards a global regulator
- The mandate, governance, operational structure, and funding of such an agency

The responses far exceeded expectations: Nearly 200 people (four out of five) from 48 countries on all continents responded.

They provided a stunning 840+ comments, testifying to the expertise and commitment of those who are

affected by sports' transgressions on a daily basis, whether as athlete representatives, policymakers, public prosecutors, sports officials, academics, or journalists.

The report on the results entitled 'ClearingSport – towards an agency countering crime and protecting integrity in world sport' was published on www.playthegame.org exactly one year after the conference, in June 2023.

Wanting a watchdog with force

The main finding of the survey was that a vast majority of respondents were not just in favour of an agency (although not everyone preferred the term 'agency'), but they want a particularly strong watchdog that not only barks but also has a strong bite.

This is illustrated, for example, by the by responses to a number of suggestions for the mandate of ClearingSport: How essential are certain capabilities/responsibilities of the agency considered to be?

In global sports where whistleblowers are mostly pushed back and top officials may not care about enforcing existing codes and rules (or breach them with impunity), it makes sense for respondents to put strong emphasis on the agency to function as platform for whistleblowers and provide a framework for source protection (88%).

Respondents also believed it is important that the agency has investigative powers (81%) and enforcement powers (87%) which they valued as highly as the ability to monitor code compliance (90%). Likewise, the

mandate to 'provide pathways for an effective remedy for victims' received over 80 per cent approval – another element that is almost entirely absent in the way sports deal with various forms of crime and integrity breaches.

Two models: With and without sport

But the question of the mandate, strange as it may seem, can be regarded as secondary. The survey respondents were more concerned with another fundamental question:

To what extent should sports organisations be involved in an agency that deals with violations by officials, breaches of self-imposed rules and sports crime? Should they even be part of this agency at all?

Two agency models emerged throughout the comments: An intergovernmental agency or a stakeholder-legitimised agency.

The latter model relies on the participation of a range of stakeholders, reflecting sports' societal impact, and including independent athletes' associations as well as sports organisations. Proponents of this option also argue for maximum independence of the agency with no influence of sports governing bodies on executive decisions.

However, they note that "such an agency must have collaboration and support from the main global sports federations at the outset for any chance of success."

In contrast, the intergovernmental model is fuelled by a great deal of scepticism as to whether sports organisations should participate. Therefore, an agency set

up by a coalition of interested governments is suggested. This could be an European Union agency, though this approach is met with objection from respondents from other continents.

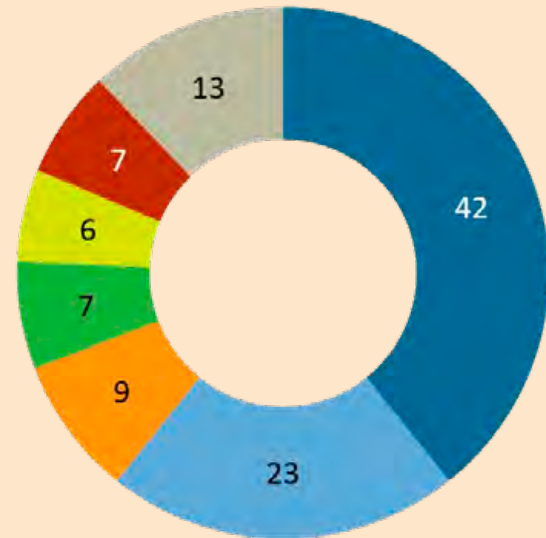
Governments involved would agree on a set of common sports crimes, harmonise legislation to criminally prosecute the offenders, possibly agree on cross-border jurisdiction, and mandate their national law enforcement agencies to cooperate with the agency.

The agency's mandate would be mainly limited to fighting sports-related crime, and by defining what constitutes sports crime, it would set standards for national sports federations, which could then be linked to public funding.

However, politicians would first have to recognise that signing declarations and non-binding partnership agreements only preserves the status quo in the interests of sports organisations (which often do not align with those of athletes or fans), and that national integrity bodies working only within frameworks of national legislation can hardly keep up with a globalised multi-billion-dollar business.

The two models are not entirely exclusive. The intergovernmental agency might be open at some point for sports federations to sign a code that is offered by the governments or, as it was put: "Provisions could be made for non-members to participate in and eventually join the coalition upon satisfying specified criteria."

Primary occupation of respondents in Play the Game's survey



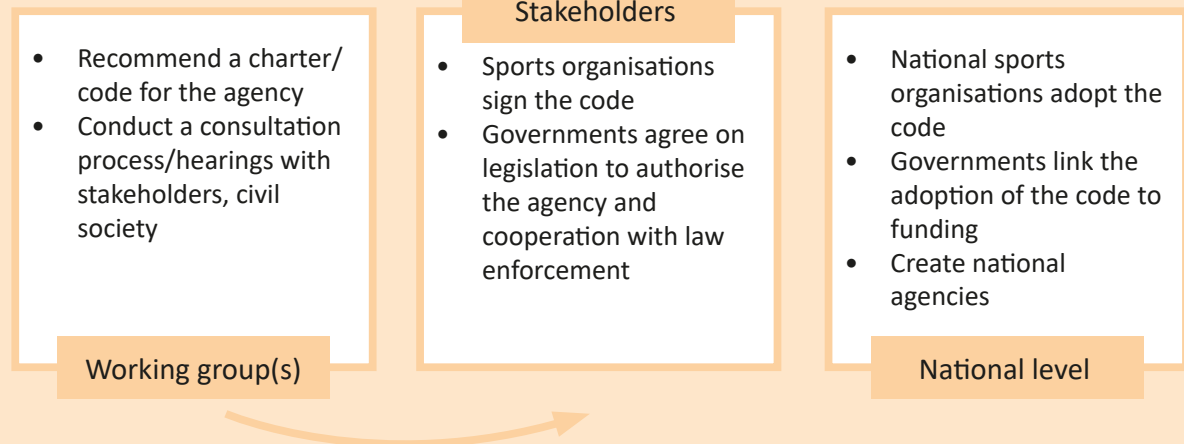
- Academics
- Sports
- Governments
- NGOs
- Investigators
- Consultants
- Journalists

The survey had 198 participants, 102 non-anonymous, from 48 countries and five continents.

Intergovernmental model



Stakeholder-legitimised model



Two models prevail in the responses from the 200 experts, one that includes sport, athlete groups and other stakeholders, and one that is purely run by governments.

Independence is key

It is worth noting that many respondents to Play the Game's survey outlined "guiding principles" to determine the work of the agency: independence would be key, to be ensured by, among other things, skills-based, non-representative oversight bodies and executive.

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), perceived as dominated by sports federations, inspired numerous comments and reflections on how to irrevocably enshrine independence in the new agency – if not the intergovernmental model is preferred for this very reason.

Furthermore: The new agency should maintain a human rights-conscious approach, pay particular attention to victims and respect geographical and gender diversity throughout its own structure.

Although a survey obviously cannot provide a full recipe for combating all forms of misconduct or crime in and through sport, there are certainly good suggestions on the table now, including first ideas on funding. Many relevant as well as surprising questions were asked and need to be addressed.

To name just a few: Should a global regulator develop a full code of conduct and governance or instead – and at least for a start – focus on the enforcement of existing rules, be they sports regulations, civil or criminal law?

What framework for cooperation with law enforcement can be set? How can an agency be built up gradually? Should sports' sponsors or television rights holders play any role in it?

Certainly, the results of a survey- however profound and resourceful they are- cannot sway governments to change the rules of engagement and justify the public funds that are invested into sports by putting the "autonomy" of sport on a new footing.

Sports organisations, who have so far fought tooth and nail against independent oversight, will not be won over easily. But the time has certainly come where sports leaders should be nostalgic about the days when doping was the main threat to their credibility.

"ClearingSport – towards an agency countering crime and protecting integrity in world sport" is available at www.playthegame.org