

NEW SEASON, FRESH DIRECTION?

Towards the end of last season, we were alarmed by allegations of match-fixing in our U 21 National team matches. This was another episode, which caused untold damage to our football. Investigations by the police led to individuals arraigned in court.

We are constantly on the lookout trying our best to guard our day-to-day football from adverse match-fixing scandals. We augur a fresh direction for our new season.

Our football's reputation on the international match-fixing scenario is, unfortunately, not commendable. We have been talking openly about this fraudulent activity and its repercussions, for over five years. Match-fixing has not vanished into thin air. It will take a united and determined effort by everyone to shut out the dubious characters from our football's landscape.

It has become a pre-season routine for a couple of clubs to seek our advice before embarking on a new joint venture with foreign sponsors or investors. These groups or individuals make an appearance before the start of every new season offering quick fix solutions to unwitting club officials.

The perplexing proposals enticing clubs to sustainability are at times, tabled in front of us in minimized form. We do our utmost to understand what really drives the interest in the project at hand. Our regulations do not empower us to condone or condemn any club from entering into a collaboration or business agreement.

We cannot block a proposition, which the club may deem appropriate. However, it is in the club's interest that we listen, examine the content of their plans and offer our direction. Ultimately, the onus will fall on the club officials themselves to seek guarantees and perform due diligence checks. What transpires thereafter is entirely their responsibility.

Meetings with the clubs are at times, convened when its officials or representatives would have a *fait accompli* thus rendering our opinion and direction superfluous. When an agreement is still in discussion, we duly express our evaluation and suggestions before its conclusion, giving the club time to reflect and decide accordingly. Sometimes the club officials or legal advisors do not return to discuss further and go ahead with their original intentions. We will eventually find out about their contracted venture through media exposure. Our advice would have, once again, been ignored.

Short-term solutions to financial difficulties are inexistent. Unless by winning a hefty lottery, striking oil, investing wisely or coming across some kind-hearted sponsor who is unconditionally prepared to pour cash into the club's coffers. Calculating criminals thrive on problems and will determinedly persuade weak individuals, who have no idea to solve their debt mess, to join them. They will step in by investing in a club, capitalising on betting fraud and profit from vast amounts of money to the club's detriment. They will suddenly appear on the scene as a godsend to support the club and stay until their investment reaps enough illegal dividends then quickly move on to their next target wherever that may take them.

Although there may be isolated cases involving local clubs, it is our duty to highlight the dangers of questionable deals. These perilous traps will unavoidably affect clubs and its members including our football in general.

Criminal gangs are targeting football without respite and will go to any length to procure more of their warped business. Players and referees, may be targeted by fixers and offered substantial bribes to participate in fraudulent behaviour. The actors on the field of play are the sole link for fixers' absolute control of a match.

UEFA on match-fixing: *"Persuading players of a team to manipulate a match, most often with the assistance of the referee"*.

History has shown us that *match-fixing for betting purposes* is not the only factor harming football's integrity. Episodes and allegations about *sporting fixes* instigated by competition keep surfacing and are an incessant worry.

Officials, players and referees should not be deceived because match-fixing is alive. They should be vigilant for any sinister indicators and duly report through available channels as established by law. ft

MATCH-FIXING FOR WHATEVER REASON IS A CRIME

