

SHIFTING FOCUS AND BRANDING

We are led to believe that match-fixing in football is the work of hardened criminals who are behind a specialised operation. This may be so on bigger platforms. It may also be perceived that known individuals are invariably behind match-fixing scams, this may also be the case. But these are not the only problematic attacks which football is facing in this ever growing and damaging scenario.

The lure of a relatively easy way to make substantial financial gains, attracts a cross section of people. Sporting success is also such an attraction to instigate crooked plans. The further incursion of match-fixing and the established football culture surrounding it, makes it less of a surprise that we are now inflicted with this cancerous malaise.

The fixers need the players on the pitch to be able to execute their plans and it is the latter who are the vital and probably the only element to be able to succeed in achieving sporting targets and illicit gains from betting activity. Do not be duped into believing that players are threatened or that they are coerced into submission. Nobody acts criminally without knowledge of his own wrongdoing and the possibility of incriminating consequences. There is no excuse whatsoever when a player accepts an offer which is brightly packaged in crisp notes right there in front of him. He does not need help to pick it up, nobody shoves it down his pocket. It is even much worse when the player seeks the package himself and makes his intentions known on the underworld market. It is damning when the player is on a standing order and will regularly deliver the goods.

Players may be under the impression that when they strike a deal with their fixer, it is a confidential agreement for a business venture which is kept in a vault in classified top secrecy. That is where they are wrong, little do they know that once they cross the line, their name is immediately shared and they are indelibly listed on an invisible book which is accessible to many. There are instances when the fixer unashamedly negotiates deals for the player behind his back. They do not realise that they would have been instantly and permanently branded, becoming the fixer's property for life.

Once branding takes place, categories are established with each individual specialising in different forms and manner. The circle of corrupt fixers and players may fake enjoyment of life in public, they may also live it up, but they should be aware that there are others out there who know everything about their football manoeuvres. The branding scorch will never fade and will blemish the player right up to his grave. He will feel its oppression when in solitary reflection, his personal guilt may not be bared in public, but it will be right there at his conscience foundations. He would have cheated his adulating fans and others who had given up their personal time serving him.

Are football stakeholders and the game's ambience itself doing enough to curtail match-fixing? I pass on the question to all involved in the sport, for them to ponder upon.

Whilst lecturing on the Integrity Tour, I always sense that my declaration and advice about branding is met with a hush and apparent concern. One fine day, whilst on my way home I was stopped by a football friend who, with tears in his eyes, told me, that the player branding which I talk about, affects him right down to his inner self and his nights have never been the same again. It is apparent that the branding bit is too much for him to fathom and to be able to look back on his career with undiluted satisfaction. He obviously knows that he must have unscrupulously deceived honest people somewhere along the line. ft