

**EDUCATION IS NEVER ENOUGH**

Shifting scenarios in our football held me back from writing another newsletter too quickly. I bided my time before embarking on another educational attempt.

The unfortunate episode of one of our National teams has again cast a damning shadow on our football both locally and internationally. It might have derailed our focus and perhaps brought out a number of unwarranted opinions which are futile in the eyes of the law and the rules. Only those involved know the details of this episode, and the adjudicators base their decisions on the information brought in front of them. The law and rules dictate.

At these latter stages of the season we witness celebrations and disappointments and everything fogs out what had happened along the season. Operational methods and manoeuvres to achieve objectives always come into contention. Energies are exasperated in trying to fend off the doubtful schemers in the game, who will never relent their ingrained corrupt approach. Disparaging comments about players and match officials will die down but will still linger on, only to be reignited by fresh episodes and the scene will be rewound again next season.

This season, in true form, I was once again requested to meet a number of individuals who wished to discuss their league matches in fine detail. It seems that some are now operating a different form of VAR. Match video clips are scrutinised and given every hue and interpretation. Comments on social media were, in my opinion, defamatory and in some cases libellous. Accusations produced smoke but the fire was never located.

I attended matches at different levels of our football leagues. Not only to entertain myself with the football on offer but just to observe. I do this as it is another learning opportunity in my continuous research on local football mentality and culture. In a number of instances, these are far from being on an ideal, correct and desired level. It is standard for me to listen to people complaining and pointing fingers at others, who seem to be convinced about their declarations but always fall short of producing the goods for us to be able to pursue their accusations further.

It is on the basis of all this that I can effectively formulate, organise and personally deliver the Malta FA Integrity Tour educational programme. This year I visited all the football clubs on the Island, educating the participants about the background of various forms of match-fixing deployed in football and how these are destroying the very soul of our game. I lectured on the psychology and blind ruthlessness of some individuals in our football. Emphasis is made on the vital element which enables the fixers to be successful. There is only one element. Matches cannot be won or lost on the street or on the stadium terraces. That vital element is certainly not found outside the football pitch. It is only found on the green rectangle where the full responsibility for an undiluted match lies during the 90+ minutes.

This year's Integrity Tour moved around the Island covering over 1000 Kms. of road, visiting 53 clubs on 29 different Tour dates between 5 March and 23 April 2018. Sessions were held at clubs, training grounds, complexes, local council halls, band clubs, parish halls and dressing rooms. Close to 2000 participants including players from different age groups, club administrators and coaches listened to what the law and rules state, what their obligations are and the repercussions associated with match-fixing criminality. Another topic was how fixers and their associates operate their criminal activity and how players are approached and tempted into wrongdoing. Commendable interest was shown throughout the Tour with some clubs managing to muster very large attendances. The absence of club committee members and administrators at some of the clubs was not conducive to the message we are struggling to portray. The programme is directed at everyone and not solely at players. If the administrators honestly care and wish to operate a clean environment, they need to listen to the dangers which may surround them and their players. Perhaps they are conversant enough with the situation and do not require further advice. Unless they dutifully understand what their legal obligations are, it would be futile for them to scamper to us seeking assistance when irreparable damage would have already been done.

We will be working on the next edition of the Integrity Tour, planned to be held in 2020, becoming a compulsory requisite for all players, coaches and officials before they are licensed to participate in any of the Association's competitions.