

THE DANGERS OF DISPARITY IN LEVELS OF COMPETITION

**SALT LAKE CITY -- A man who allegedly offered two Belize players large sums of money to fix a CONCACAF Gold Cup match against the United States has been identified by soccer officials, and he's believed to have tried to fix matches in other countries.*

In a statement Thursday, CONCACAF said it and FIFA, soccer's world governing body, are investigating the bribery allegations made by Ian Gaynair and Woodrow West. The two players said they rejected the offer, made Sunday, and immediately reported it. When a CONCACAF representative showed them a photo of a man being monitored for trying to fix matches in other countries, the Belize players confirmed it was the same man who had approached them.

"So this isn't just about our country or a one-time thing," coach Ian Mork said after the team's practice. "This is something much bigger."

Belize lost to the United States 6-1 on Tuesday night in the Jaguars' first Gold Cup appearance. It faces Costa Rica here on Saturday night, and finishes Group C play next Tuesday with a game against Cuba in East Hartford, Conn.

CONCACAF, which is the federation of North and Central American and Caribbean nations, said it could not comment further on the ongoing investigation. But Mork said he doesn't believe the players were asked to fix any other games beside Tuesday's match against the U.S.

Match fixing is a global problem in soccer, with FIFA estimating that fixers make more than \$5 billion in profits each year from manipulating matches across all sports. Stopping it is a priority, and CONCACAF said in its statement that, together with FIFA and Interpol, it had three seminars with its member associations in recent months focusing on "educating, identifying and preventing match manipulation."

But the Gold Cup can be a particularly attractive target because of the disparity in the level of competition. Lopsided scores are not out of the norm when World Cup regulars such as Mexico and the United States play small nations like Belize, and semi-professional players are seen as being more vulnerable to bribes.

FIFA investigated reports of fixed matches at the 2011 CONCACAF Gold Cup, with Sports Illustrated reporting the questionable games involved Cuba, Grenada and El Salvador.

cont'd..

THE DANGERS OF DISPARITY IN LEVELS OF COMPETITION

Page 2..

Only two of the 23 players on Belize's roster play soccer professionally: goalie Shane Orio and defender Elroy Smith play in Honduras. The rest have regular jobs and play in the semi-pro league in Belize in their free time.

"We're just trying our best to compete at this level," said Mork, an American. "I could see how they would be targets, I guess, but our minds don't really go there. It was a big shock."

Mork and the players said Gaynair and West were approached Sunday in Portland, Ore., where they played the Americans, by a man who had also been at their hotel in Guatemala City in June when the Jaguars faced Guatemala in an exhibition.

"He was wanting to become friends and come visit Belize," Mork said. "Then all of sudden he also showed up in Portland. It was through this kind of friendship of wanting to support the Belize team. It was obviously part of a plan to target our players."

Mork and the players wouldn't give specifics about the offer, referring questions to CONCACAF. Gaynair, a defender who scored Belize's lone goal against the United States, said only that the man asked them to "assure him that we would lose the match." West, a goalie, did confirm the basics of the accounts he first gave to a Belize TV station earlier this week, saying that the man offered him a lump sum of money, but no specific amount, to "sell the game" against the United States.

"We turned the offer down. We did what we were supposed to," West said. "FIFA has control of that now."

Though CONCACAF pays travel expenses once the team arrived in the United States, the Jaguars had to do fundraisers back home to come up with enough money for the rest of their expenses. "Man, we did all kinds of things to reach where we are at right now," Gaynair said. "We did barbecues, we did telethons, all kind of thing."

Though Mork said he knows match-fixing is a problem that plagues soccer globally, he was still surprised that it touched his squad.

"I was really proud of the players," he added. "They did the right thing."

**Brady McCombs – The Huffington Post.*

This is an eye opener and a common occurrence for smaller teams which never stand a chance. Their results are taken for granted so can easily be manipulated to the match-fixers' wishes and criminal objectives. It is all up to the players' conscience and integrity not to break the law, and trick their fans. ft