

YOU ARE BEING WATCHED

The recent revelations coming from Australia, highlight the efforts being made to eradicate match-fixing in football. The way news about the police, swooping in to arrest people connected with a match-fixing syndicate, gave the impression that law enforcers were on top of it.

The story originated in the United Kingdom where the players, involved in match-fixing scams, played before relocating their "profession" to Australia. Players' records within the database held by our partners Sportradar, showed a regular pattern of individuals' involvement in fixed matches. Following Sportradar's players track record information, given to the Football Federation Australia and also to the Victoria Police, it was inevitable that action had to be taken. FFA CEO, David Gallop said "The integrity of football is paramount, we provided information to Victoria Police within 24 hours of receiving alert from Sportradar, who then worked closely with the investigation team" These efforts produced alarming results. The investigations revealed that up to ten players were recruited by the syndicate, showing that they were actually "contracted" before flying down under. The highly organised criminals running the syndicate had been fixing matches in Australia for some years making hundreds of thousands of dollars on the Asian betting markets.

The arrested players are mid-tier professionals. It is understood that the match-fixing syndicate had targeted the players and a second tier competition in Australia because it believed that it would lessen the chance of detection. The money being wagered in Asia on professional football in Australia and elsewhere, including second tier leagues, has been increasing dramatically over the last few years. One of the teams at the centre of what looms as the largest match fixing scandal to hit Australia, is at the bottom of the Victoria Premier league and has been trashed on several occasions this year. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been wagered by the syndicate on the outcome of the club's games including the number of goals conceded, all in collaboration with the players.

This scandal will put huge pressure on the state and federal government to concede to long standing requests for laws to be changed so authorities can share suspected corruption information with sporting bodies.

The story follows a global pattern and is an eye opener as well as a warning to individuals and groups messing around with Maltese football. It is important for players, club administrators, referees and others to know that they are being watched in more ways than one. We will be upgrading our educational approach and will be intensifying our prevention programme. We will make stronger representations to legislators and law enforcers explaining the gravity of the situation, its effect on society in general, and pleading for their unconditional support.ft