

AFTERMATH TO NEWSLETTER 35

When, in 2011, I was appointed as one of the European Integrity Officers representing their Association, I was stepping onto unknown territory. No one could guide me and nobody could specifically define my role, including Uefa. Three years down the line the European Integrity network is now well established, my contacts at Malta Police, Interpol, Europol, Bochum Police, Italian Guardia di Finanza, Fifa, Uefa, Sportradar and other European Bodies, have been instrumental in strengthening my position and knowledge.

What I had set out as my priority was to assist the honest people in football to weed out the bad characters who had quickly moved in and capitalised on an already compromised situation. Match-fixing had reached another level and had to be tackled differently.

My initial undertaking was to investigate the Norway vs Malta match of 2007. This had sparked us into the reality of match-fixing for betting purposes scam, and that we were also an integral part of the phenomenon. I needed to engage in thorough research and understanding of the subject, taking me all round the island and abroad speaking to hundreds of people in football and outside. I have devoted innumerable hours gaining sensitive information both in Malta and overseas. I have managed, in a relatively short time, to garner knowledge of how match-fixing is steered.

My primary aim has always been to protect football for the benefit of the dedicated individuals in the game, the fans and all stakeholders. But most importantly I felt that I had to offer my energy to smoothen out the road for present and future generations.

What I was saying and doing all along, did not, initially and even recently, go down well with everyone. They were getting the wrong impression and message, they thought that I was after their blood or out to tarnish somebody's reputation. Far from it, all I was interested in was to give our football a cleaner image. I found it in a disastrous state and I wanted to understand why it had reached such low levels of credibility. It hurt me no end. At the expense of my family's time and worries I put my ears to the ground and found out how match-fixing works and what the mentality and targets of some individuals in the game were. I spoke to present and past club officials, coaches, players, referees, fans, journalists, stadium operatives, betting operators, bookmakers, gamblers, traders, runners, fixers, and the public. They all felt better speaking about their experiences. I have managed to gain their confidence and trust. They all, invariably, wish that football is cleaned out from certain criminal elements within it. But their only worry is that not everyone is prepared to assist. Some may be caught in a trap by ill meaning individuals within their patch.

I have never placed all the clubs in the same basket as some have alleged. Those who feel that they are spanking clean should not worry about my declarations. I have now given all the clubs the opportunity to listen to the facts and if they are unaware of what is going on within their own environment, to be aware and to be on their guard. The ball is now in their court. I have given them the lead, now they can do their own research.

I feel satisfied that I have managed to visit the clubs with the Integrity Tour, educating participants in a way never dreamt of in the past. I have educated Referees, Administrators, Coaches, Parents, Law Students, Schoolchildren, Junior National team players, National Authorities, Law Enforcers and Politicians. I have also, on many an occasion, been invited to speak about match-fixing at various fora round Europe.

Part of my mission has been achieved and I have managed to spark an unprecedented reaction in the country. I have done the exacting work and came out with the facts. Now it rests on the honest people in football to do their bit. They must not shift their focus from reality to some technicality which will only deter progress.

Let's not miss the wood for the trees.

I augur the projected Task Force every success. They can now work on the base that I have set.ft