



# Corruption in sport: From the playing field to the field of policy

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## Abstract

How is corruption in sport evolving into a global public policy issue? In the past century, four trends have affected sport according to Paoli and Donati (2013) – de-amateurisation at the turn of the twentieth century, medicalisation since the 1960s, politicisation and commercialisation to the point where sport is now a business worth more than US\$141 billion annually. Each of these trends had a corrupting effect on what is generally perceived as a past ‘golden age’ of sport. In the twenty-first century more public funding is being directed into sport in the developed and developing world. As a result this paper will argue organised sport has entered a fifth evolutionary trend – criminalisation. In this latest phase, public policy needs to grapple with what constitutes corruption in what has historically been a private market.

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## 1. Introduction: a quiet year

2015 is a relatively quiet year for global sport. There will be no Olympic Games – either summer or winter, the World Cup for Football is awaiting its next (already controversial) manifestation in Russia and there is not even a Commonwealth Games scheduled. However, international competition rolls on, nations will compete in football, cricket, both forms of rugby and myriad other sports. Annual events like the Tour de France and the regular national and local leagues will gear up for the season. Yet among all this positive social interaction lurks the ever-present threat of corruption. Nearly every day the media runs stories on one form or another of corruption in sport. Often this is left to sports officials to deal with as sport, in essence, occupies the private sphere. However, throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, sport is emerging as a concern for public officials.

This research intends to bring corruption in sport forward in the public policy literature. Most research on corruption in sport occupies the academic space associated with sports science and management. Despite millions of public dollars flowing into sport in different countries around the world, there is limited examination of sport corruption in the public policy literature. This is not to say there is no utility in the broader literature for the public policy scholar or practitioner – Misra, Anderson, and Saunders (2013) make an important contribution in their criminological analysis of Australian sporting integrity in a volume sponsored by the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) and the *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA) (Haberfeld & Sheehan, 2013). A supposition for this gap could be that the largest sporting market in the world is the United States. US sport is

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mainly private enterprise and it has been left to the market to get its own house in order. However, many other national governments make significant public contributions to sport. Therefore this article represents an early contribution to an important part of future public policy research.

This paper uses the TASP model outlined by [Graycar \(2015\)](#) to provide an overview of the scale and variety of corruption in sport. The research proposes a definition of corruption in sport, followed by a closer look at three types of sport-specific malfeasance – doping, match-fixing and host-rights corruption. Analysis of the controls for these types of corruption within the TASP framework illustrates some issues for public policy.

Research on corruption in sport tends to focus on one aspect or another of the issue without examining the whole range. [Paoli and Donati's \(2013\)](#) seminal work, *The Sport Doping Market*, investigates a significant issue over a long period, providing the first analysis of what this market looks like. However, doping (defined below) is only one type of corruption in sport. Another type is match-fixing. In recent years, the international government organisation Interpol has worked closely with sporting bodies such as FIFA to tackle the problem of gambling related match-fixing. While this is a public-private partnership with funds invested from both spheres, its focus is on the particular problem of illegal gambling's influence on the integrity of sport. The Interpol/FIFA partnership has already contributed to the academic literature through the publication of the aforementioned volume ([Haberfeld & Sheehan, 2013](#)), which reviewed global responses to the problem of match-fixing. The Haberfeld and Sheehan volume provides a selection of policy responses and contributes to the growing academic literature on match-fixing, particularly in football ([Boeri & Severgnini, 2011](#); [Forrest, McHale, & McAuley, 2008](#); [Forrest & Simmons, 2003](#); [Hill, 2009, 2010](#); [Martin de Sanctis, 2014](#)). There is also a growing literature on host-rights corruption. However, due to academic reluctance to cite (as yet) unproven cases as examples of such behaviour, much of the literature on host rights abuses is based on journalistic endeavours (see [Jennings, 1996, 2011](#); [Jennings & Sambrook, 2000](#)). To understand the full scope of the problem it is timely to introduce a working definition of corruption in sport and an overview of the behaviours that constitute this corruption in the sporting sector.

## 2. Defining corruption in sport

Defining *corruption in sport* is problematic. This follows from the difficulty in defining corruption in the first place. The common definitions of corruption tend to be limited by the definer's perspective. For example, the now classic view for political scientists defines corruption as “behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private regarding (personal, close family, private clique) pecuniary or status gains; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence” ([Nye, 1967: 419](#)). This definition comes from the perspective of the political scientist thinking about development. Whereas the commonly accepted standard definition of corruption, established by the World Bank and now used by Transparency International – the abuse of entrusted power for private gain – derives from the economists' perspective. As [Caiden \(2001\)](#) rightly points out, neither definition leaves space for ‘noble cause’ corruption – where power is abused in the pursuit of a public, rather than personal gain. To illustrate, noble cause corruption occurs whenever police purposely use unlawful techniques to secure evidence of a crime; it follows from a legal perspective that any conviction manifesting from such a process is corrupt (see [Prenzler, 2009, 2011](#); [Sherman, 1978, 1974](#)). Similarly, [Barcham, Hindess, and Larmour \(2012\)](#) demonstrate that variation in what is commonly understood to be corruption is rooted in particular societies and particular times.

Modern sport involves political and economic activity at the global level, particularly in the bidding process to host prestigious events including the Olympic Games, the FIFA World Cup and similar international events. Recent bid processes turned the common understandings of corruption on their head – where public officials bribe private actors without the prospect of personal gain by the public official ([Jennings & Sambrook, 2000](#)). These definitional problems combined with a different reality in the sporting sphere (as compared to that of politics, economics or law) make it necessary to develop a working definition of corruption in sport adequate for use today and to anchor its meaning for this and subsequent discussion of the issue.

[Gorse and Chadwick \(2011: 8\)](#) proposed that ‘corruption in sport involves any illegal, immoral or unethical activity that attempts to deliberately distort the result of a sporting contest for the personal material gain of one or more parties involved in that activity.’ However, they acknowledge this definition does not cover the activities of sports governing bodies and the allocation of host rights. Furthermore, when dealing with international competition, one must ask whose morals and whose ethics provide the yardstick for determining what is, or is not, corruption in sport.

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