

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the PROtect Integrity player education programme

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Background

Over the last decade, the reputation of European and World sport has been undermined by repeated, confirmed instances of actual or attempted manipulation of sports competitions, often by criminals seeking to make profits on betting markets. This corruption has the potential to trigger a loss of confidence in the sports sector, whether as a professional spectacle or as an appropriate sphere for recreational activity by young people. If it continues, it may also weaken faith that betting itself is a fair activity, damaging the regulated betting sector in EU member states as well as their sports culture.

Turning the tide against match fixing will require systematic and sustained action by a number of actors. The set of actions required is embodied in the provisions of the *Council of Europe Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions*. The Preamble of the Convention recognises that all countries and all types of sport are potentially at risk and Article 6 requires signatories to encourage awareness raising, education and training to strengthen the fight against manipulation.

The partners in the *PROtect Integrity* programme aimed to make a material contribution to the fight against match fixing by devising a player education programme, to be led by player associations and to be delivered to athletes in a range of sports and in several European countries. Independent player associations were, to use a term from the academic literature, to serve as one of the ‘pillars of integrity’ required in any concerted attempt to dismantle corruption. They would also be fulfilling their responsibility for the wellbeing of their members by protecting vulnerable athletes who might become involved in either collaborating in a fix or in breaking betting rules introduced as part of sets of measures to maintain public confidence in sport.

The partners were made aware that the growing risks of match fixing have a structural cause. In the illicit market for match fixes, there is growing demand because of hugely increasing liquidity in sports betting markets, much of it residing in an illegal and unregulated international sector: increased liquidity allows greater stakes to be placed and criminals can therefore make bigger profits from fixing than ever before. Hence, increasingly, they target sport. While European licensed operators might, should and do adopt measures to detect and prevent nefarious use of their own products, criminals will often take advantage of international markets which lie beyond the control of European regulators and there is therefore a limit on the effectiveness of policies based on suppressing the demand for fixes.

The supply in the illicit market for fixes comes from sports insiders, athletes and referees, who must execute fixes on the field. Policy to deter supply must therefore be focussed on trying to change decisions of sports insiders who might otherwise collaborate in manipulation. This is where education and awareness training can play a role though it must be perceived as likely to be effective only as part of a package of measures to encourage athletes to say ‘no’ to invitations to supply a fix. For example, players in some sports leagues are treated badly, are paid little and sometimes irregularly, and may be intimidated to participate in fixes by corrupt owners. The risk that they will collaborate in fixing is

elevated. Ensuring a high standard of governance in sport to stop ownership by criminals and to ensure fair treatment of athletes is therefore an essential component of a systematic approach to prevention. The importance of effective and trusted whistleblowing mechanisms was also noted by the partners in the project.

But, even in well-governed sports, players accept propositions to fix. Can one hope that education has the capability to modify their decisions?

Anti-corruption training cannot be expected to be successful in changing the decisions of every player with an opportunity to fix. As in all professions, there will be some with low ethical standards and a cynical attitude who feel they have little to lose by exploiting their occupation to make additional, illicit earnings. However, resistance to fixing can be strengthened among many players. Some may not fully understand the likelihood and consequences of being caught. They need better information to change their decisions. Others, especially young players, may be naïve in failing even to recognise that they are being drawn into corruption. They need to be made more aware of how fixers recruit and then maintain their hold on players. Yet others may be vulnerable because of a range of personal problems. They need support to know where to turn if fixers' money seems the only way out.

Anti-match fixing training works by modifying the behaviour among such groups to reduce the pool of players susceptible to a fix. And this can even be a way of deterring the hard-to-influence group. Trust is necessary to sustain criminal networks. The greater the number of players who subscribe to an anti-fixing culture, the more risky it becomes to try to recruit collaborators with whom to execute a fix: it becomes hard to know whom to trust – especially when there is a positive duty to report corrupt approaches. This undermines the ability even of hardened offenders to carry out their plans.

This, then, is the rationale for player education as one plank in the fight against the manipulation of sport. The partners believe that player associations are particularly well placed to be the agencies to deliver such education. Lessons from other fields (for example, anti-knife crime) where the target group for an education programme includes many young people suggest that an intervention must be led by an individual who is credible to the audience. Player association representatives were often themselves professional athletes and this itself is likely to command respect. Further, in some sports, there is a (justifiable) lack of trust in employers; a player representative rather than an official of the sport is then more likely to be believed and there will be greater confidence in taking up an offer of support if an athlete is already touched by match fixing and seeks help.

The *PROtect Integrity* programme included an active online and social media campaign to raise and reinforce awareness of its core messages to players, summarised by the EU Athletes Code of Conduct. But delivery of the formal programme was in two stages. First, there was a “Train the Trainer” event in Lyon, France, spread over 2½ days and led by Interpol, around the concept of “three R’s: Recognise, Resist, Report”. The audience, representing player associations from eleven countries and ten different

sports, consisted of individuals who would themselves deliver the training to the athletes during club visits over the following 1½ years or (in some cases) pass on what they had learned to colleagues who would. The sessions in Lyon focused on learning about how betting markets work, about the methods used by fixers to recruit players, about the consequences for players from fixing (illustrated by personal histories) and about betting rules for players. There was also a session on how, practically, fixing has been addressed in rugby and a session about the presentational skills needed to get messages across most effectively. Thus armed, those who had been on the Lyon course went back to their respective countries and carried out the training to players on varying timetables according to the seasonal pattern of each particular sport.

Full evaluation of the *PROtect Integrity* programme is not possible given that, at the time of this Report, it has only just been completed. The ultimate goal was to bring about behavioural change (resistance to fixing, reporting suspicious approaches, avoiding involvement with betting on one's own sport) and this outcome will or will not take place during the following months and years. For the present, it is possible only to carry out *process evaluation*. Did the programme achieve its immediate objectives? For example, was delivery of the programme successful in terms of raising understanding amongst its participants (thus enabling them to make better decisions in the future)?

For the Train the Trainer event, all participants were asked to complete a questionnaire before and after travelling to Lyon. Each asked respondents to rate their own knowledge of issues related to sport integrity. We then measured the extent to which self-assessed knowledge had changed after Lyon. For the subsequent training to players, we took a sample of more than 1,500 athletes (out of 14,700 people who were targeted by the education project in its second year) and asked them to complete a confidential questionnaire, variously on paper or online and translated into the local language as appropriate, to assess how much they had learned.

‘Train the Trainer’

As would be hoped from a group of representatives of player associations, the response rates to the pre- and post-event questionnaires were high. We collected completed surveys from 21 individuals before the training and 19 of them also returned their forms afterwards. As the questions did not relate to personal information, there was no need for anonymity and we were able to identify, for example, which participants reported very limited knowledge of the issues to be addressed in the course. Generally, those with least prior knowledge tended to come from associations which had not taken part before in EU Athletes programmes.

Two key questions asked how they rated their knowledge of betting and of match fixing, using a Likert scale where very little knowledge was coded as 1 and very substantial knowledge was coded as 6. We were interested to observe whether and how much respondents’ scores changed once they had undergone the training. A small number might already have been well informed on the issues covered and indeed one respondent answered 6 to both questions on both questionnaires; so, for one individual at least, no ‘improvement’ was capable of being observed.

Collectively, the participants, prior to the event, rated their knowledge of sports betting markets much less highly than their knowledge of match fixing issues. The mean response to the betting market question pre-event was 3.15 and two respondents gave the lowest possible answer. The mean for the match fixing question was 3.90 (with one giving the lowest answer).

On both fronts, self-assessed knowledge improved significantly after Lyon though one individual gave a one-point lower score on each question in the post- questionnaire compared with in the pre-questionnaire. Too much significance cannot be attached to just one respondent because, naturally, there is a chance that there will be random variation between dates in what number on a scale is chosen by an individual even if his or her underlying state has not changed. Patterns can only be discerned over several responses (where the effects of individual random variations are likely to cancel each other out).

On the betting markets question, the mean score increased from 3.15 to 4.68. Fifteen participants showed increased knowledge. Each of those who had the lowest possible response (1) first time increased their rating to 4 in the post-questionnaire. Of the nine who had responded 2 or 3, five showed an increase of either two or three points on the scale. There is therefore every reason to believe that respondents generally felt significantly more knowledgeable about how sports betting markets work as a result of attending the event. Further, those who had expressed least confidence about their understanding tended to record quite a high level of confidence about their knowledge following the event.

On match fixing, the mean response increased from 3.90 to 4.74 with twelve participants entering a higher rating after than before the event. In the post- questionnaire, thirteen of nineteen rated their

knowledge of match fixing at either 5 or 6. Perhaps one might have hoped for even more to be confident about their knowledge given that participants now had to go out and deliver training to members of their associations. However, among the five who had rated their knowledge at level 4, three had previously answered only at 1 or 2 on the scale: thus the training seems to have made them significantly more confident about their knowledge.

Whatever their view of the degree of their personal knowledge, participants generally were ‘very confident’ or ‘confident’ about their ability to deliver education on betting and fixing. For this question, of the nineteen participants who completed the post- questionnaire, two gave the highest possible answer (6), ten answered at level 5 and no one answered lower than level 4. Together the sessions on the issues themselves and the session on communication skills appear to have prepared participants such that they felt ready and able to deliver the training.

One issue which attracted discussion at the event was the problem of players betting on their own sport. Emphasising to their members that this violates rules and risks serious consequences is especially important for player associations because several athletes in diverse sports have received bans for this offence. Players may be confused by the fact that rules have changed from the past or find it hard to understand why they cannot bet on matches involving other teams in other countries or indeed suffer from gambling disorder which drives them to bet. In the first questionnaire, we had asked respondents to estimate the percentage of players in their league who bet on their sport. No one answered zero and, for eight sports, the estimate given was greater than 20%. In one sport, the representative of the player association believed that a majority of players engaged in betting on their own sport. These are of course only subjective assessments by individuals concerning the behaviour of others, albeit ones to whom they may be close. Nevertheless, it is of concern that so many players might be placing themselves at risk in terms of their careers and this justifies the emphasis on the “Never bet on your own sport” adopted in the online and social media messaging that supplemented the *PROtect Integrity* project.

The results of the questionnaires show that the respondents felt the training event to have been successful in terms of significantly raising knowledge about betting and match fixing for the majority of participants.

The majority of participants were either “confident” or “very confident” about delivering the education to players after the training event.

Delivery by the player associations

We collected a sample of 1,556 responses from players who completed questionnaires after receiving *PROtect Integrity* training from a representative of their player association. They comprised 141 players from basketball in France and Italy, 68 cricketers from England and Wales, 33 footballers from France, 47 male and 44 female futsal players in Spain (where there are separate associations for men and women), 9 from Gaelic sports in Ireland, 301 handball players (spread across Denmark, France, Iceland and Spain), 147 ice hockey players based in Sweden, 701 players from English, French and Irish rugby union and 65 volleyball players practicing their sport in Greece. The sample was drawn disproportionately from later in the delivery period since some player associations had to be reminded about the importance of having recipients evaluate the training. Sometimes time was too limited to distribute questionnaires, depending on the allocation of time by the sports clubs for the training event organised for the players.

Players were asked first about whether they had received match fixing education in the past. Personnel change frequently in the player labour force, so some will not have received any previous training because they were new entrants to the profession or perhaps migrants from other leagues and countries without systematic integrity education. The presence of these sorts of players likely accounts for the handful of English cricketers who claimed never to have received such training. The great majority of cricketers reported multiple training in the past, which is to be expected given that they have mandatory annual integrity training from the England and Wales Cricket Board. Cricket has introduced this regime because of repeated corruption cases in the past. Some other sports appear more complacent and the player associations were not just reinforcing past training but filling an absolute gap in provision. Nearly all players in women's futsal in Spain and a clear majority of Greek volleyball players had never received training before. Below we shall report that there were players in both these structures who reported having received suspicious approaches, so the relevant leagues appear to be failing to respond to a problem which already exists. Detailed figures for handball reveal significant differences between countries. In France, only 23/141 respondents had not had training in the previous year but in Denmark it was 42/106. This suggests that player education has been given greater emphasis in France, where there has been a prominent case of match fixing in the national league. Leagues without such an experience may be less proactive notwithstanding that this particular sport attracts an active betting market. Similarly, betting interest in ice hockey is strong, particularly in Eastern Europe, and it is perhaps of concern that (just over) half of Swedish players claimed never before to have received education in match fixing issues.

27% of the athletes surveyed had not previously received match fixing education whilst 42% had received education several times in the past.

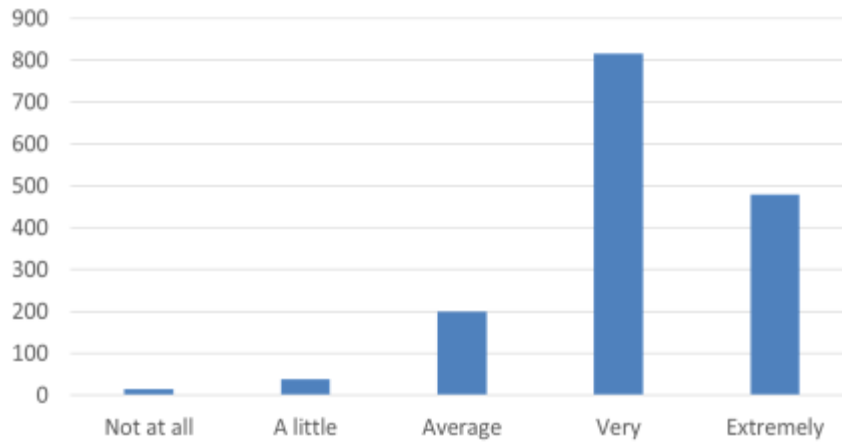
Table 1: Have you received match fixing education in the past?

	No, never	Yes - more than a year ago	Yes - during last year	Yes - several times	Total
Basketball	37	6	44	54	141
Cricket	6		2	60	68
Football	6	10	9	9	34
Futsal (female)	45		2		47
Futsal (male)	23	2	6	13	44
Gaelic football	4		1		5
Handball	61	23	93	123	300
Hurling	1		2		3
Ice hockey	75	8	31	32	146
Rugby	131	44	179	344	698
Volleyball	40	4	10	11	65
<i>Total</i>	<i>429</i>	<i>97</i>	<i>379</i>	<i>646</i>	<i>1551</i>

We asked players whether they had found the session useful. As illustrated by Figure 1, a very large majority of respondents rated the training as either “extremely useful” or “very useful”. Unsurprisingly there was some relationship between how useful they found it and how much prior training they had received. For example, 38.3% of those claiming no prior exposure to training answered “extremely useful” but only 30.0% of those who had experienced training “several times”. Nevertheless, the general response was still very positive in this latter group as *another* 53.3% answered “very useful”. This is a reassuring result, particularly because experience in other fields addressing prevention of anti-social behaviour suggests a need for frequent reinforcement of the message. At least when delivered by the player association, participants appear still to have found value in learning about an issue even where they had had prior instruction.

More than 80% of athletes surveyed found the education on match fixing delivered through the project to be “very” or “extremely” useful.

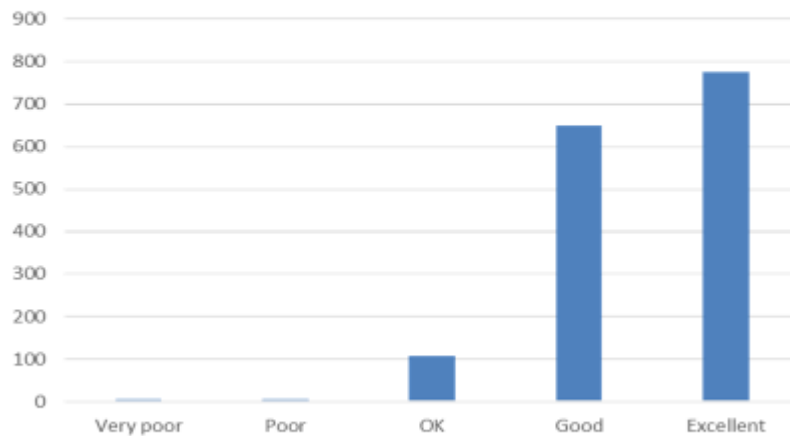
Figure 1. Have you found today's match fixing education useful?



The players proved also to be largely satisfied with the quality of delivery by the speaker. Figure 2 illustrates that more than half judged it “excellent” and the number who regarded it as poor was negligible.

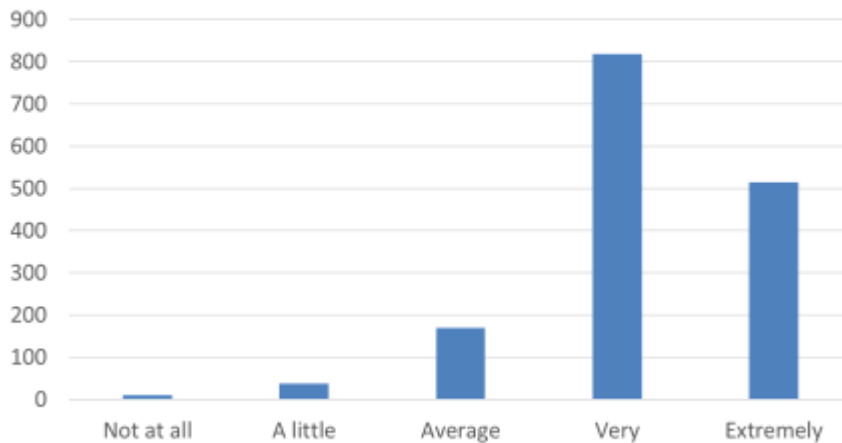
The presentation by the player associations was judged to be excellent or good by more than 90% of the athletes sampled.

Figure 2. Today, how well presented was the information by the speaker?



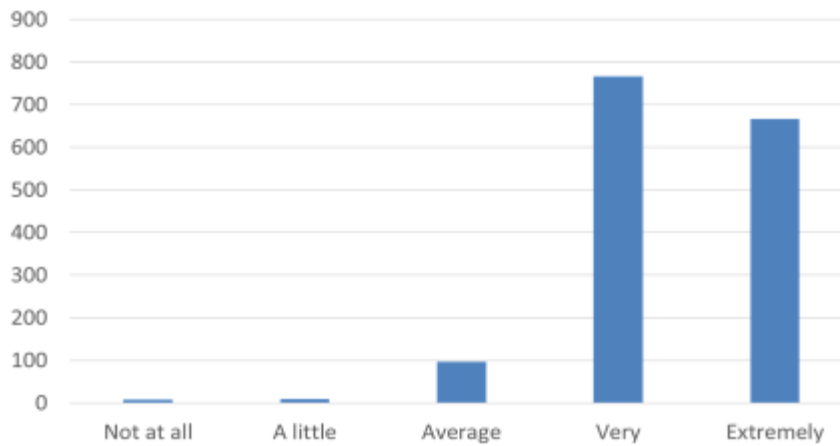
An important objective of the project was to raise awareness of their sports’ restrictions on betting. The players were asked whether they thought that their knowledge of the rules had been increased. The responses (Figure 3) suggest that this objective was achieved so far as most players were concerned.

Figure 3. Having seen this presentation, will you now be more aware of the restrictions and implications of betting with the game?



A key argument to support delivery of training by player associations was that athletes would likely have a high level of trust in the person with whom they were dealing. This might, for example, make them more willing to raise sensitive questions. Answers to our question on degree of trust in the speaker (Figure 4) suggest that a high level of trust was indeed present.

Figure 4. Do you trust the person delivering today's education?



The player association staff delivering the education were either “very” or “extremely” trusted by more than 90% of the athletes targeted.

Trust is also an issue when it comes to players acting on the imperative in the Code of Conduct and the Three R’s to report suspicions about manipulation of matches, such as approaches to participate in a fix. Several sports make it a disciplinary offence not to report and many players have been sanctioned under such regulations. But it can be hard for a player to know to whom to report. The player may have doubts about the integrity of others and fear reprisals as a ‘trouble maker’. The player may have worries about anonymity and confidentiality. We asked players in whom they would trust sufficiently to be willing to make a report. They could choose any number of possibilities from a list which included their club, the league, the governing body, the police, a lawyer, their agent, a whistle blower line and their player association. 82.7% of 1,543 responses included the player association in their list of those they would trust and 35.1% would trust *only* the player association. The club was the next most popular response (and agents featured hardly at all). Whistle blower lines were mentioned relatively infrequently but this is likely because such a facility is not available to many. EU Athletes and its partners are embarking on the *PROtect Integrity+* project to introduce whistle blowing infrastructure, led by player associations, to a number of sports in a range of European countries.

Players' experience of match fixing

The opportunity was taken to include in the player survey questions on whether athletes had ever themselves received suspicious approaches or felt under pressure by their employer to under-perform. The survey included a note that, if they wished to discuss their responses to these questions, they could contact their player association.

Table 2. Have you ever had a suspicious approach regarding inside information, betting or match fixing?

	No	Yes
Basketball	140	1
Cricket	66	2
Football	34	0
Futsal (female)	42	5
Futsal (male)	42	2
Gaelic sports	8	0
Handball	294	7
Ice hockey	140	1
Rugby	685	12
Volleyball	59	6
<i>Total</i>	<i>1510</i>	<i>36</i>

Table 3. Have you ever felt pressured by your employer to underperform?

	No	Yes
Basketball	140	1
Cricket	66	2
Football	34	0
Futsal (female)	47	0
Futsal (male)	43	1
Gaelic football	5	0
Handball	298	3
Hurling	3	0
Ice hockey	145	0
Rugby	694	3
Volleyball	63	2
<i>Total</i>	<i>1518</i>	<i>12</i>

On average, 2.3% of players surveyed had received suspicious approaches regarding match fixing or betting.

On average, 0.8% of players reported that they had felt pressured by underperform by their club.

The patterns of responses to the two questions are exhibited in Tables 2 and 3. The proportion of all players who had ever received an approach was 2.3%. There were higher figures than this only in the cases of women's futsal (10.6%), volleyball (9.2%), men's futsal (4.5%) and cricket (2.9%). In each of these sports, only one country's league was represented: Spain for both futsal groups, Greece for volleyball and England & Wales for cricket.

Clearly there is scope for concern in particular about Spanish futsal and Greek volleyball. But, overall, fewer players than some might have expected had had personal experience of attempts to recruit them (and very few indeed had felt pressure to underperform from their employers; these few may of course have received such pressure while playing in other countries). One might have expected higher figures on the basis of other player surveys. For example, 15% of about 600 European sports players surveyed in 2017 for the *Fix The Fixing* project, part of the Erasmus+ sports programme, reported having received suspicious approaches *in the preceding twelve months* compared with only 2.3% of our players who had *ever* received a suspicious approach. It is true that the *Fix The Fixing* survey was quite strongly skewed towards football (which accounted for more than half of the sample) whereas we had only 33

footballers and all those from France. This would have been expected to push the *Fix The Fixing* estimate up since football is known to have many integrity issues (especially but certainly not exclusively in Eastern and Southern Europe). But even in other sports, our estimates are lower by far than in *Fix The Fixing* and some other studies. For example, less than 1% of our basketball players had ever been approached whereas a large scale survey of national basketball players for Transparency International Lithuania revealed a widespread culture of manipulating matches.

We do not doubt the veracity of the picture painted by these other surveys. Results of surveys reflect who has been sampled. Countries differ in the degree of corruption within their sports (for example, *Fix The Fixing* found very different levels of threat to integrity in Greece and Austria) and so do individual sports. The players in our sample were employed in structures in which it has been possible for active player associations to develop and play their full part in protecting their sports. Player associations in other sports and countries where corruption may be embedded within sports governance itself face a hostile environment if they are tolerated at all. There is therefore no inconsistency in finding that far fewer players have been approached in the population with which we have worked compared with wider populations studied in other surveys. Even the presence of an active player association may be a deterrent to fixers to some extent because vulnerable players have an additional resource from which to seek help.

This by no means implies that the effort to keep players safe is wasted in the case of our sports. As betting markets grow, fixers target an ever widening range of countries and sports. The flurry of cases reported in the last year in Swedish football is testimony to the reality that even countries with a high reputation for probity are not safe from the threat of manipulation by fixers who identify vulnerable players and may also use migrant players pre-corrupted in other environments. As betting markets grow, fixers are also widening their activities to target sports, such as table tennis, which have no known history of systematic fixing and where, as a result, there may be complacency about potential threats. Given the reality of these threats, player education (and other measures recommended to be adopted within sports by the Council of Europe Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions) are required across sport. The partners believe that the *PROtect Integrity* project has demonstrated the effectiveness of player education led by their player associations.

Summary and Key findings

The Train the Trainer conference significantly raised player associations' knowledge about betting and match fixing for the majority of participants.

The majority of player association staff were either "confident" or "very confident" about delivering the education to players after the train the trainer event.

Prior to the project, the knowledge amongst European athletes about match fixing varied significantly: 27% of the athletes surveyed had not previously received any match fixing education whilst 42% had received education several times in the past.

The player association led education model was well received by the players.

More than 80% of athletes surveyed found the education on match fixing delivered by the player associations to be "very" or "extremely" useful. This suggests that even athletes who had previously received education found something new or useful in the latest education round.

The player association staff delivering the education were either "very" or "extremely" trusted by the more than 90% of the athletes sampled.

The presentation by the player associations was judged to be "excellent" or "good" by more than 90% of the athletes sampled.

The incidence of match fixing approaches reported by the athletes sampled was lower than in other surveys.

On average, 2.3% of players surveyed had received suspicious approaches regarding match fixing or betting. Interestingly 0.8% of athletes reported that they had felt pressured to underperform by their clubs.

It may be that having active player associations, with their focus on athlete welfare and rights, plays a role in reducing a sport's susceptibility to corruptors.