

**Brussels, 21<sup>st</sup> of October 2020**

## **Impact of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic on players and their associations**

### **Discussion with EU Athletes member player associations, 14<sup>th</sup> of October 2020**

#### **Key points**

In general, it must be recognized that sports federations, the leagues and player unions have worked well together to get professional sport back for this season. There have also been some initiatives from governments and sport organizations aiming to support athletes in difficult situation because of the loss of income. However, as the devastating Covid-19 pandemic continues, there are several issues to consider and act upon from the players and their associations' point of view.

#### **Economic impact on sport**

- The financial impact on professional sport from the loss of crowds and sponsors will be devastating in 2021. Sport needs emergency government support if it is to survive in its current form beyond the end of the year.

*"Some clubs are already going bankrupt and more will follow without government help."*

- Women's elite sport has been hardest hit by the pandemic for a variety of reasons. These include a lack of financial reserves within the women's game, greater reliance on paying spectators, part-time contracts meaning players need other jobs, which increases exposure to Covid-19 and makes complying with restrictions more challenging.
- Too many professional athletes are struggling because they are unable to access social security support due to their lack of proper labour contracts. This needs to be urgently addressed at the national level.

*"For elite athletes that rely on prize money and sponsors, cancellation of sport events means that they have no income. We already have several athletes thinking about retiring from sport and starting another job, simply because they do not have financial means to continue."*

## **Player associations**

- Player associations membership has increased during the pandemic with increased levels of player engagement. However, player associations are facing financial difficulties due to decreased commercial funding and increased demand for services. Player associations must be supported by any emergency government funds for professional sport.

## **Covid-19 protocols**

- There is a worrying lack of consistency between top leagues and lower leagues and men's and women's sport when it comes to health and testing protocols.
- Enforcement of Covid-19 protocols is inconsistent and needs to be improved. There is little point in having regulations if they are not monitored and enforced.

*"Athletes want to play, but the health and safety must come first. If sport organizations don't provide the tests some of our players will have to pay for their own tests if they want testing before matches."*

- There is an urgent need for an agreed medical protocol to cover elite athlete post-infection recovery and return to play. There are examples of players returning to sport after catching Covid-19 resulting in significant health problems.

*"We had a player who returned to play after being infected with the coronavirus, and then needed emergency medical treatment. There needs to be a science-backed agreed post-infection return to play medical protocol for elite athletes."*

- Matches are being postponed due to Covid-19 outbreaks at clubs. These are creating fixture congestion and a worrying increase in player workloads which presents health and safety concerns.

## **International competition**

- International sporting competitions present numerous problems. There is no "level playing field" due to different national restrictions, testing regimes, travel quarantines and increased player workloads. There would be benefit in European-wide approach to some aspects of the pandemic and its affect upon sport.