

# Match-fixing and Britain's summer of sport

## Were match-fixing concerns realised this summer?

185 British Olympic and Paralympic medals (63 of them gold), the most British Olympic medals since 1908, the first ever British Tour de France winner, the first British men's singles Grand Slam winner for 76 years, the first British men's singles Wimbledon finalist for 74 years, a British' US PGA Champion and two British world number ones this summer in golf, and (at different times) the world's number one ranked cricket team in all formats. The summer of 2012 has been arguably the most successful ever in the history of British sport. However, prior to the start of this memorable sporting summer, it was feared by many - IOC President Jacques Rogge included - that match-fixing could become one of those enduring memories.

Arguably, the sports integrity issue which grabbed the most headlines was the eight badminton players from South Korea, China and Indonesia who were disqualified from the Olympics for deliberately trying to lose - not because they had been tempted or intimidated into doing so by the betting underworld, but because they apparently believed they could get a better draw in the knockout stage by underperforming in the round-robin stage. Similarly, according to press reports, it wasn't a fraudulent betting related reason behind the Japanese women's Olympic football team playing for a draw rather than a win in their game against South Africa; rather a desire to avoid having to travel to Glasgow for their quarter final match<sup>1</sup>.

In fact, no betting-related integrity issue appears to have made its way into the public domain in respect of the Olympics or Paralympics. Perhaps this is a reflection of the fact that the Olympic and Paralympic events are the pinnacle of any athlete's career, so the temptation to underperform for money should be easier to resist. It also seems logical that corrupters are more likely to spend their time and money grooming competitors in events which attract large volumes of bets on the unregulated markets all year round, rather than only once every four years.

At the same time, the regulated betting industry in Britain appears to have enjoyed a successful summer of its own, reporting much greater interest in betting on London 2012 than anticipated. Sporting Index reported taking nine times, and Ladbrokes four times, as many bets on London 2012 as they did for Beijing 2008. Similarly, Paddy Power reported three or four times as much betting activity on the Olympics as it hoped for<sup>2</sup>.

Nevertheless, for all the good news, this summer has not been entirely free of betting-related match-fixing headlines. We have seen a number of betting integrity related issues, including:

- Former Pakistan legspinner Danish Kaneria banned for life by the England and Wales Cricket Board for being "a grave danger to the game of cricket", a ban which the ICC board agreed should be enforced by every cricket-playing nation;
- Juventus coach Antonio Conte banned for 10 months for failing to report alleged match-fixing whilst coaching in Italy's Serie B;
- Two former Chinese football officials, four former national

team players and several match officials and team owners reportedly jailed for up to 10 and a half years for their roles in a match-fixing scandal; and

- Serbian tennis player David Savic failing to overturn his life ban for match-fixing at the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

Although all of the above issues relate to match-fixing allegedly taking place prior to this year, it would be naïve to be suggest initial fears about match-fixing were unfounded. However much we hope they were, the fact is that we don't know for sure. Whilst concrete conclusions are hard to draw, this summer's experience does seem to support what most in the industry already knew: that a prevalence of regulated betting does not lead to match-fixing. Quite the opposite, in fact. The regulated betting industry is good at monitoring suspicious betting patterns, and reporting to sports governing bodies and regulators. As a result, match-fixers tend to avoid the regulated markets, and instead operate on unregulated markets where their bets are not monitored and traced in the same way. This is also borne out by the European Sports Security Association (ESSA)'s Integrity Report, issued in June this year, which showed a sustained low in betting corruption alerts in 2011.

Whilst it should be obvious that the interests of sport and of the regulated betting industry are aligned on this issue, this sometimes needs to be reiterated. It's inconceivable that the regulated betting operators would have taken the same number of bets this summer had their customers not believed in the integrity of the events they were watching. Ultimately, the message remains the same - match-fixing is a serious and international problem that requires a co-ordinated effort on the part of the betting industry, the sports industry, regulators, governments and law enforcement authorities to help fight it. Perhaps another of this summer's events - a meeting of the European Parliament on 27 June - might turn out to be helpful in that regard, confirming as it did that match-fixing is very much "high on the political agenda"<sup>3</sup> and indicating that a "methodology for action"<sup>4</sup> will be communicated this Autumn - although it needs to lead to something rather more tangible.

To end on a positive note, though: it really was a spectacular summer, wasn't it?

**Andrew Danson** Senior Associate  
K&L Gates LLP, London  
andrew.danson@klgates.com

1. Rory McIlroy is Northern Irish, but could compete for Britain in the Olympics if he chooses Team GB over Ireland in 2016.
2. <http://www.insidethegames.biz/sports/summer/football/18014-world-champions-japan-escape-punishment-by-fifa-over-london-2012-match-fixing-admission>
3. Betview, September 2012.
4. <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/12/500&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN>
5. <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/12/502&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>