

CONTEMPORARY REFLECTIONS ON THE INTERSECTIONS OF POLITICS, CORRUPTION AND SPORTS

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Abstract: This paper aims to present the negative impacts of politics and corruption on sports as a social phenomenon, which, due to such malign influences, is increasingly moving away from its original humanistic concept. The impact of politics and corruption is driving sports towards dehumanisation and national, religious, and racial discrimination of all its participants. Sports have become a battleground for power struggles between superpowers and small states, with nationalism and xenophobia imposing characteristics that contradict the very essence of sports.

Today, sports are a crucial aspect of the ideological operations of systems that use sports to solve certain problems or as a mobilising force to support the system. Often, sports are treated as a means of achieving the basic ideological goals of society or the government. Sports have become an ideological tool to deceive the masses and maintain the control of the ruling powers. The integration of politics, sports, and power allows sports to be turned into entertainment for the masses, and under the motto "bread and circuses," the people are turned into an audience, a crowd, which, through repressive behaviour control, absorbs social discontent arising from the marginal social position of certain groups.

Sports are suitable for influencing the masses, especially the youth, and for affirming various political ideologies and social anomalies and irregularities. Therefore, corruption, a negative phenomenon that has not spared sports despite its initially noble assumptions, is not new. In one form or another, it has always existed. Corruption appears in various forms throughout sports, undermining honesty, fair play, and trust in the game. The increasing amounts of money inherent in sports make this industry susceptible to corruption, while the participants become addicted to power, elitism, and betting.

Keywords: Dehumanization, ideological goals, political ideologies, corruption, social groups.

Introduction

The phenomenon of sports is highly multifaceted, and we can approach it from a functional-motor standpoint, nevertheless, at the same time, we can also view it as a broader social and humanistic phenomenon. Modern sports do not pertain exclusively to individual and private choices; rather their realisation involves many people and holds significant social,

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cultural, and societal importance. A multidisciplinary approach does not exclude the dominant significance of the economic development of sports relative to cultural aspects.

Furthermore, the role of sports in society cannot be viewed only through the lens of sports itself but also through its influence and connection with other areas of life, such as business, economy, communications and media, and politics. On the other hand, politics has always had its interests within sports, especially among the political elite directly or indirectly involved in the financing and investment in sports and sports events, along with the need to connect with the comprehensive social and populist character integrated into sports.

Over the centuries, sports have evolved to support different values and goals. This includes its impact on education in society, physical willingness, the desire and ambition for competition and winning prizes, creating spectacles out of competitions, hedonism, the development of awareness of social and national belonging, bringing people, nations, or races and other different identities closer together or, conversely, separating and confronting them. In the last few decades, sports have undergone drastic changes in their basic function and spirit, organization, and place in society.

Certainly, sports are one of the fundamental social institutions, inseparable from the structure of society and institutions of family, economy, media, politics, education, and religion, and are an integral part of everyday life for people worldwide (Perasović et al., 2007). The politicization of sports typically occurs only where the essence and meaning of human engagement in sports are not clear, and where there are no humane criteria for evaluating sports achievements. In elite sports, athletes do not start from an internal, self-aware need to affirm themselves in sports based on social interests outside of sports. In developed democracies, political interference in sports is usually unobtrusive or at least imperceptible, due to the nature of sports itself (Mester, 1995).

On the other hand, in totalitarian regimes, sports are an important aspect of the ideological activity of the system, offering an opportunity to solve certain problems or representing a mobilizing force in support of the system (Girginov, 2004). Sports are often associated with politics. The pronounced profit motives in sports have led to new problems, such as money laundering and the business and moral unreliability of participants. Some anomalies are associated with politically exposed persons (PEPs).

Undoubtedly, sports are a source of unity for many around the world. Watching and participating in sports transcends differences in language, culture, and beliefs. However, in recent years, corruption in sports competitions by organized criminal groups and individuals threatens the integrity of sports. With high earnings and limited risk of detection and sanctioning, corrupt activities in sports have become attractive to criminals and criminal individuals who have integrated into sports organizations and clubs.

Significant risks of corruption and crime have accompanied the dramatic evolution of sports over the past decade. Corrupt practices are present in all segments of our society and, unfortunately, are visible even among those advocating for fair play. The fight against corruption in sports requires national and international cooperation between sports, public authorities, betting regulators, the gambling industry, and law enforcement. It is essential for all these stakeholders to come together in the fight against crime in sports.

Politics and Sports

From an ideological perspective, three dominant groups of ideologies see different functions in various types of sports engagement. One group promotes further political development intending to enable political involvement in those areas of sports that cannot prove themselves due to economic reasons. Another group, which is indifferent to such a role, views sports as a very important element for promoting social values where politics plays a secondary role; the state acts as a guardian ensuring the functioning of independent sports bodies and considers sports as a corrupt activity if linked to politics in any way. The third group of ideologies denies any connection between politics and sports (Kustec Lipicer and Maksuti, 2010).

From a neo-Marxist viewpoint, sports are an ideological tool used to deceive the masses to maintain bourgeois control (Giulianotti, 2008). The integration of politics, sports, and power is closely tied to ideology. Specific examples of this relationship include ancient sports celebrations and the later use of sports to elevate ideologies of power (such as Nazism and later communism) through participation in the Olympic movement (Senn, 1999).

In this context, it is important to analyse the development and significance of international sporting events, from the Olympic Games to the FIFA World Cup. These events have symbolically become the most important global events, granting the winning nations great symbolic power. The perception of these events led to the formation of not only strong power structures within sports organizations but also increased interest from states, evident in the increased financial support from participating countries and the formulation of capable policies that, justified by the public interest, dominate primarily in elite sports (De Boshier et al., 2008).

Besides political themes concerning elite sports, some authors have recently decided to study the role of non-professional, amateur, and recreational sports in relation to ideological views on politics and the role of the state (Allison, 2001).

The politicization of sports is as old as sports themselves. The earliest testimonies of sports elevated to organized international and inter-state competitions speak of their distinctly political nature. At the Olympic Games in ancient Greece, competitors participated as individuals but strongly emphasized their affiliation with their city-state, and victory always had dual significance—individual and national. In ancient Greece, Olympic winners were so richly rewarded by their city-state that an Olympic victory meant material security for life. This attention shows how politically important a victory was to the city-state.

Since then, the politicization of sports has increased to the extent that sports have become a part of national prestige, where a nation-state injects self-confidence into its community and proves to the world that it is superior in something internationally measurable, such as sports. The obsession with winning at the Olympic Games, even when wars were halted for the games (in ancient Greece) and today when wars cancel the games, has always been such that real Olympic wars are fought for the most victories, as the one who collects the most gold, silver, and bronze medals becomes the unofficial champion of the games, although this has never been approved by the International Olympic Committee as it is considered contrary to the Olympic idea.

Since the Winter Olympic Games in Lake Placid (1980), daily national medal tallies have been published in the media, which may contribute to prestige but not to friendship

among nations. The Berlin Olympic Games (1936) aimed to prove that Nazi Germany had become the strongest sports nation in the world. Thanks to an unprecedented concentration of state resources, experts, athletes, and technical conditions, Germany won the most medals (89), surpassing the previously unreachable USA with only 66. Adolf Hitler used the Olympic Games for political propaganda and as a platform for his Nazi ideology of Aryan race superiority. The other two fascist totalitarian states, Italy and Japan also surpassed Great Britain and France, highly developed sports democracies, at the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. In his idealism, and perhaps due to insufficient historical knowledge, Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympic Games (Athens 1896), unsuccessfully tried to impose the principle "important to participate, not to win," and the idea that competitors should compete for personal honour and the glory of sports, not primarily for national prestige.

Sports and sporting events have long ceased to exclusively promote the Olympic spirit, including the International Olympic Committee itself, which by definition should be politically neutral. Politics, along with pervasive commercialization, has dehumanized sports. The Olympic Games were not held three times—1916 because of World War I, and 1940 and 1944 due to World War II. Politically forced boycotts and non-participations also occurred. First, many African countries boycotted the Montreal Games in 1976, demanding the exclusion of New Zealand, whose rugby team had visited then-apartheid South Africa. Four years later, a large number of national teams, 65 in total, boycotted the Moscow Games due to the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan. In 1984, 14 communist countries responded by not participating in the Los Angeles Games. The last boycott was minimal, with only Cuba, Nicaragua, North Korea, and Ethiopia not participating in the Seoul Games in 1988.

Since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, athletes from Russia and Belarus have faced sanctions in many sports, following Ukraine's call for a complete ban on Russian athletes. Clearly, the organization of the Paris Olympic Games has also been influenced by the politics of other European countries and the USA. "Obviously, there can be no Russian flag at the Games in Paris. I believe there is a consensus that Russia, as a country, has no place at the Olympic Games when it has committed war crimes and deported children," said French President Emmanuel Macron in an interview with sports newspaper *L'Equipe* in 2023.

The Baltic countries and Poland have called on international sports bodies to ban Russian and Belarusian athletes from participating in the Olympics and other sports competitions as long as the war in Ukraine continues. Poland is striving to form a coalition of 40 countries, including the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, to jointly block the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes in the 2024 Olympic Games. "Taking into account our initiative, if a decision is made to allow them to participate, we will launch a boycott campaign to render the games meaningless," said Bortniczuk. However, on the other hand, the Secretary-General of the Austrian Olympic Committee (ÖOC) Peter Mennel, along with the President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Thomas Bach, has advocated for the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes in the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris. "The opinion of the International Olympic Committee is that no athlete should be prevented from competing solely because of their passport. We in the Austrian Olympic Committee agree with this assessment," said Mennel.

How is politics connected to sporting events or manifestations? Events that unite people from various parts of the world for the greater good. Simply put, they positively

affect the physical and mental health of individuals and society in general. Furthermore, when we talk about major sporting events where there is a high concentration of emotions, entertainment, carefreeness, and achieving publicity without great expense, this makes sporting events attractive targets for terrorist attacks. Sporting events where a large number of people gather or participate in a relatively small area provide a unique opportunity for a terrorist group or organization to carry out an act of terrorism. Terrorism is the deliberate use of illegal violence or the threat of illegal violence to instil fear, with the intent to coerce or intimidate authorities or society to achieve political, religious, or ideological goals.

From 1970 to the end of 2017, a total of 61 terrorist organizations carried out 234 terrorist attacks during sports events. At least 556 people were killed, and 2,490 were injured. Between 1970 and 1999, 72 terrorist attacks were carried out during sports events, resulting in at least 262 injuries or deaths. From 2000 to 2017, there were 162 attacks during sports events, causing at least 2,786 injuries or deaths. Terrorist attacks on sports events have occurred in 48 countries, which accounts for about a quarter of all countries in the world. The massacre during the 1972 Munich Olympics is certainly the most well-known when it comes to major sports events and terrorist attacks in history. However, there have been many less known but very devastating attacks.

During a basketball game, political rivals attempted to assassinate the mayor of Batagu in the Philippine city of Parang with a bomb, aiming to prevent his participation in the 2004 elections. Twenty-two people were killed, and 70, including the mayor, were injured. In Tal Afar (Iraq) in 2010, a triple suicide attack during a soccer match killed 27 people and injured 125. In the 2000s, there were at least 52 attacks during sports events in Iraq, resulting in at least 860 casualties. A suicide bombing and a car bomb attack were carried out in the outer perimeter of Beşiktaş Vodafone Arena in Istanbul during a match between Beşiktaş and Bursaspor in 2016. Two attacks occurred within a short time frame, killing 46 and injuring 164 people. In 2004, Chechen leader Kadyrov was killed by a suicide bomber explosion beneath the VIP section of the stadium in Grozny. Regarding major sports events, it's worth noting the bombing of the Boston Marathon on April 15, 2013, in Boston. Two bombs exploded near the finish line, killing three people and injuring 282. Shortly thereafter, the police found at least one more unexploded device (Leško, 2018).

Likewise, let's remember the Heysel Stadium in Brussels and the death of 39 fans. The incident was attributed to hooliganism, but it prompted sharp political measures and actions by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom. In 1969, a war broke out between El Salvador and Honduras after the conclusion of the World Cup qualifying matches. Mass riots with international ramifications were also recorded in Dakar in 2003 during a qualifying soccer match between Senegal and Gambia. After the match, violent clashes were witnessed on the territory of both countries. In Gambia, Senegalese citizens were severely beaten, and more than 200 Senegalese sought refuge in the embassy. The riots resulted in the closing of the border between Gambia and Senegal until order was restored.

In our region, sports have also served as a facade and fertile ground for politicians. Sports are popular, and media-exposed, and gather masses that just need to be channelled and "harnessed" for their interests. In Serbia, security services therefore first influenced fan groups. Through them, the problem of national intolerance was "opened." On May 13, 1990, at Maksimir Stadium in Zagreb, Dinamo met Red Star. Already instrumentalized fans did not come to watch the match, which was never played. They came to be actors in the collapse of

the system that was planned to disappear. In front of cameras and in a live broadcast, the fight with chauvinistic outbursts and the attack of a player on a policeman was a classic message of a collapsed system. On September 26, 1990, at Poljud Stadium in Split, Hajduk played Partizan. Home fans interrupted the match by storming the field, removing the Yugoslav flag, burning it, and returning it burning to the flagpole – 20,000 spectators were thrilled. The emergence of nationalism (nationalist outbursts) at sports events is neither accidental nor separate from the strategy of politics. Nationalism is stimulated, either directly or indirectly, actively or by “turning a blind eye.” Nationalism is the last and worst means for those who want to retain their positions at all costs. Nationalism is a textbook example of turning economic, social, and political problems into national issues, into the problem of national endangerment. These are attempts to prevent the integration of individuals who are objectively united by the problem of their own existence. Such a development of relations is particularly detrimental to the youth, who are left to the street, to the anarchy of everyday life, to nothingness. Naturally, such behaviour, the formation of attitudes, the adoption of values, and the role assigned to them in stadiums, reciprocally affect their behaviour in society, as well as the attitude of young people from other regions towards them.

Politics and political organizations use various manifestations of sports, especially those connected to play and competition because politics has the resources to realize the goals of these forms of sports. However, sports organizations do not do this without compensation; on the contrary, they extract maximum benefit from political needs, gaining money and various material goods, prestige, and social power.

Some argue that sport is neutral and uninterested in politics, while politics is interested in sport. For what happens around sport, sport is not to blame, but the society that uses and abuses it. The claim that sport is not apolitical is evidenced by attempts to turn it into a quest for national identity, political emancipation, or the consolidation of political systems (Bjelajac, 2006).

The mere involvement of politics in sport and its transformation into a political tool causes the degradation of sport and politics, as political goals are achieved through sport. Sport can also serve as a distinguishing mark, a certain image of society. In such situations, it is elevated to the level of social politics, and the image that is sometimes created and conveyed through sport takes precedence over traditional forms of direct political promotion. Sport achieves this through strong non-verbal communication, emotional charge, ritual, and dialogue between spectators and participants (Bjelajac, 2006).

In the conditions of a highly developed industrial, scientific, and technical civilization that permeates almost all areas of life, the objective need for sport as one of the autonomous and elemental needs of modern man is strengthening. At the same time, certain structural tendencies rooted in the dominant ways of social life are also strengthening and deepening. This pertains to one of the fundamental needs of modern human beings for movement, diverse physical activity, and testing of one’s abilities and powers. In the world of work, the need for physical activity is objectively decreasing, so it is reasonable to expect an increase and strengthening of the need for sport (Bjelajac, 2006). Sport should, therefore, develop as a pronounced counterbalance to what dominates the world of work and politics. This means that under the conditions of the modern world, sports could appear and function as an “oasis of the realm of freedom” (Ibid).

The influence of the authorities on sport is increasing, but so is the influence of sport on the authorities. The main reason for this is the rise in prestige, significance, mass appeal, quality, and power of sports activities, especially certain ones. Since everything has a price, the paternalism of politics is increasingly imposed on sport, making it more dependent on it. Bureaucracy in sports societies and clubs and the affirmation of exploitative relationships underlie these relations.

More and more records, medals, and points are being pursued at any cost, even at the cost of turning athletes into obedient “robots” who are compensated for their obedience with various benefits in society. This best testifies to such relationships. Yet sports activity, like any kinesiological activity, has entirely different premises (satisfying the need for physical activity and creative engagement, establishing specific communication among people, and expressing emotions and aspirations) (Bjelajac, 2006).

The international reputation of a country is one of the fundamental factors for achieving national security and national interests. As early as the 1980s, academic circles pointed out that theorists should pay attention to sports because it is an important social factor that can influence articulation in international relations, known as *soft power*. Today, the success of national teams or representatives in major international competitions significantly affects the international perception of countries and has become an integral part of the Global Soft Power Index, which confirms that sport should be considered in the context of international relations, state branding, and public diplomacy.

Sport, as a means of (re)branding a country, is reflected in the hosting of international sports events (sports events can serve to achieve national interests that would not be achievable through regular means), the success of athletes in international competitions, and the construction of specialized sports complexes that make the country internationally recognizable (e.g., Dubai Sports City, Singapore Sports Hub Complex, etc.).

History reminds us that sport has been instrumentalized as a means of state-building, regime promotion, sending political messages, establishing and enhancing international dialogues, and as a geopolitical weapon or means of radicalizing international relations. Sport has played a multifaceted role in the international recognition of newly formed states, including Bosnia and Herzegovina and many others. In the post-Cold War period, newly formed states mainly applied for membership in the International Olympic Committee and FIFA before the United Nations.

The role of sport has repeatedly proven important, sometimes crucial, in establishing positive bilateral dialogue. In the context of table tennis exchanges between the American and Chinese teams during the strained relations between their countries in the 1970s, President Nixon acknowledged that sport helped pave the way for China, giving rise to the term ping-pong diplomacy. Similar goals were pursued with initiatives such as baseball diplomacy between the USA and Cuba, football diplomacy between Turkey and Armenia, and Chinese sports diplomacy, which is one of the key tools in its relations with Taiwan.

Notably, the joint appearance of the two Koreas in ice hockey at the 2018 Winter Olympics and the men’s World Handball Championship in 2019 stands out. North Korea and South Korea submitted a request for a joint appearance at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021: in basketball and women’s field hockey, rowing (certain women’s and men’s events), and judo (team events).

Today, sports diplomacy is increasingly relevant and is strategically utilized by many countries. It involves the formal and informal actions of the state, diplomatic representatives, and sports officials to implement foreign policy through sport.

There are two main categories of its application: the state use of sporting achievements as instruments of diplomacy (sports competitiveness) and the use of sports for communication, negotiation, and sending diplomatic messages.

Corruption and Sport

Today, corruption in sports is considered to involve organized crime and has a global character. Bribery, match-fixing, fraud in sports betting, money laundering, and other criminal financial activities are the most common criminal activities associated with sports.

According to Europol reports from 2020, organized crime is most prevalent in football and tennis. Following these, in terms of corruption, are basketball, handball, beach volleyball, and ice hockey (Hafner et al., 2020).

Corruption is not solely a legal issue but also a social relationship that has become a serious national security problem. It affects socio-economic development, limits investments and the realization of international business partnerships, damages the state's image, and unquestionably endangers national security. In the broad spectrum of activities it affects, corruption has not spared sports, despite the presumption of its initial nobility. The widespread nature of corruption in sports is best evidenced by the fact that Interpol has systematically recognized this issue. Corrupt processes can involve athletes, coaches, other sports workers, clubs, federations, international sports organizations, betting companies, sponsors' representatives, and others. Corruption in sports includes bribery, extortion, various types of abuses and conflicts of interest, tax evasion, nepotism, clientelism, cronyism, influence peddling, etc.

Examples of corruption or organized crime through sports are possible in several segments: corruption and organized crime in the process of obtaining hosting and organizing mega sports events; match-fixing; non-transparent and illegal management in sports; and the use of prohibited (doping) methods. Over the decades, especially in recent years when football has become entirely commercialized, numerous scandals and corrupt actions related to football have emerged. In 2015, a corruption scandal of a scale never before seen in the world's top football organization occurred.

On the eve of FIFA's annual meeting in Zurich, its officials were arrested. "Jeffrey Webb, head of the football federation of North and Central America and the Caribbean, who is also one of the key figures in FIFA, was arrested. His predecessor Jack Warner, as well as Eugenio Figueredo, a member of the Uruguayan football federation and a former footballer, Eduardo Li, president of the Costa Rican football federation, Julio Rocha, a FIFA member, Rafael Esquivel, president of the Venezuelan football federation, Jose Maria Marin, former president of the Brazilian football federation, and Nicolas Leoz, former president of the South American federation, were also arrested. The name of Costas Takkas is also mentioned. It is said that another 15 football officials from around the world are under investigation, so these arrests are likely just the beginning." The arrested officials were charged with crimes of corruption, accepting bribes, and money laundering, with the damage estimated in multi-million amounts (Express.hr, 2015).

"The Swiss Ministry of Justice (FOJ) blocked accounts in several banks following today's arrest of officials from the International Football Federation (FIFA) accused of involvement in corruption. Thus, the so-called 'FIFA case' has gone a step further, and the investigation will show exactly how many millions are at stake. According to initial information, the arrested FIFA officials are accused of accepting bribes worth more than \$100 million." (Tportal. hr, 2015).

"The FBI is investigating due to suspicions about the illegality of Russia and Qatar being selected as host countries for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups. News that the FBI was investigating FIFA first emerged in 2013. They were assisted in the investigation by Chuck Blazer, a former senior FIFA official, whom the FBI 'recruited' after it was discovered he had not paid huge amounts of tax on money he received from a percentage he got from Concacaf, the football federation of the Caribbean, North and Central America." Specifically, Chuck Blazer was accused of receiving \$20 million from Concacaf. "He is known by the nickname 'Mr. Ten Percent' because he had a deal with the federation that he would receive ten per cent of every dollar the federation earned." (Express. hr, 2015).

Shortly after the mentioned scandal, then-FIFA President Sepp Blatter resigned, saying: "FIFA is not corrupt." There is no corruption in football, only people who are susceptible to bribery. FIFA is suffering, but positive things are happening after the accusations that have hit it, he also stated. "I resigned because I want to protect FIFA. I can protect myself; I am strong enough." (Vecernji. hr, 2015).

Corruption scandals also did not bypass UEFA President Michel Platini. He is suspected of receiving a bribe from Sepp Blatter. "One of the serious accusations against Sepp Blatter states that he paid Michel Platini a disputed €1.8 million. As a result, FIFA suspended both of them for three months, complicating the situation ahead of the upcoming elections for its new leader." (Tportal.hr, 2015).

Almost a year after the arrest of football officials in Zurich, Michel Platini resigned as UEFA President. "The Frenchman previously announced when he filed an appeal against the suspension given to him by FIFA that he would resign as UEFA President if his appeal failed. Today, after the CAS decision, he said he was resigning to 'continue his fight before the Swiss courts.' On December 21, FIFA decided to suspend Platini from all football-related activities for eight years, but that penalty was reduced to six years after his appeal in February." (Jutarnji.hr, 2016).

"Dinamo's Executive President Zdravko Mamić and four other people were arrested early this morning. Among those arrested were Mamić's son Mario, Istrian entrepreneurs Igor Krota and Sandro Stipančić, and shortly after, the Executive Director of the Croatian Football Federation, Damir Vrbanović, as they are suspected of tax evasion. Allegedly, the problematic transfers of players from Dinamo were conducted through the Mamić Sport Agency, which was run by Mario Mamić. About 80 million kuna was extracted from Dinamo in this way." (Hrt. hr, 2015).

"Mamić has been under investigation by the Croatian Bureau for Combating Corruption and Organized Crime (USKOK) for a while due to suspicions that he, together with his brother Zoran, Vrbanović, and tax official Milan Pernar, caused at least 117.8 million kuna in damages to Dinamo and at least 12.2 million kuna in unreported and unpaid taxes. According to USKOK, Zdravko Mamić illegally extracted at least 52 million kuna from Dinamo, while his younger brother Zoran earned 38.1 million kuna illegally from the club and through

tax evasion. The Mamić brothers and Vrbanović were released from investigative custody on July 15 after posting bail." (Index.hr, 2015).

The latest research from Transparency International's "Global Corruption in Sport Report" has covered a series of international corruption scandals, not only in football but also in athletics and tennis. The study involved 25,000 fans across 28 countries and revealed that 69 percent of fans do not trust the International Football Federation (FIFA), but 50 percent believe it should be given a chance to restore its reputation, which can only happen through a transparent process in the upcoming election of new FIFA leadership and fundamental changes that must occur urgently. (Vijesti.rtl.hr, 2016).

Sport as a phenomenon, despite its positive values, can be susceptible to organized crime, corruption, and money laundering. On the global scale of criminal activities, money laundering is most prevalent in popular sports, financially lucrative, or traditionally linked to criminal elements (such as football, auto and horse racing, boxing, and kickboxing), as well as in player transfers. This essentially means that almost all sports could be targeted by criminals, albeit for different reasons (FATF, 2009).

Considering the internationalization of sport, significant financial flows, and high financial stakes, money laundering poses a special threat to the football market. Abuses of football and other sports for money laundering led to the erosion of the sports values system. The FATF report lists over twenty money laundering methods in the football sector, ranging from simple cases of smuggling large sums of money to complex international schemes.

International, regional, and national initiatives undertaken by the European Union, national government bodies, sports organizations, FIFA, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), and football associations have become more vigorous, but not sufficient in expressing concern and recognizing the need to combat money laundering in sports (Fijat, 2011).

The influence of politics on sports is increasingly profound, just as sports impact politics. As sports become more commercialized (where everything is paid for), they become more dependent on political organizations and their ideologies as holders of power and therefore material resources. This dynamic promotes exploitative relationships between politics and sports, where athletes often agree to promote political ideologies to gain various societal benefits. It is becoming clearer that sports are becoming yet another tool for increasing economic power and profiteering for individuals and groups, rather than serving the broader societal purposes of entertainment, recreation, socialization, and more.

Under certain societal conditions, sports can become arenas of political abuse, spheres of covert militarization of society, domains of absolutism, and avenues for manipulating people. Corruption in sports is not a new phenomenon; corrupt activities in managing sports institutions and competitions have been documented since ancient times, but over the past two decades, we have witnessed a significant increase in criminal activities in this area. As corruption in various forms pervades sports, it undermines integrity, fair play, and trust in the game.

The outcomes in sports largely depend on the efforts athletes invest, efforts that are likely to diminish as the financial stakes increase. Unfortunately, these issues are present in every imaginable aspect of sports. The fact is that globalization, vast financial inflows, the rapid growth of legal and illegal sports betting, and technological advancements are transforming

the ways sports are practised and consumed, making them increasingly attractive to criminal networks seeking illicit profits.

The professional athlete has become akin to a commodity, gaining market value like any other material object, and the investments made in sports categorized as profit-generating surpass the investments in some industrial sectors. Athletes today are prisoners of totalitarian sports camps, serving as directed robots used by professional clubs for commercial and advertising purposes. Being an athlete today means serving either state ideology or business interests.

The European Commission clearly identifies threats and challenges that have emerged in European sport, citing commercial pressures, exploitation of young players, doping, racism, violence, corruption, and money laundering. Gender inequality and abuse are sometimes visible in sports activities as well.

The purpose of sport is to unite and bring people and nations closer together, and this is its noble role and function. Unfortunately, some powerful figures, whether from political or business aspects, seek to diminish this primary role and function of sport and instead impose a negative role of spreading hatred, nationalism, racism, etc., through it. Instances of nationalism and racism in sports events are neither accidental nor separate from overall governance strategies.

Nationalism and racism, directly or indirectly, actively or by “turning a blind eye,” are stimulated, sometimes even by societies themselves. This is one of the most diverse forms of mass consciousness channelling, one of the most insidious forms of corrupting people, breaking their activist and critical consciousness trying to address exploitation and imposition. It is one of the darkest ways to halt history, attempting to confront all that humanity has already fought for. Ethnic nationalism is a serious trap for the entire social system, and thus for sports as well. It is very apparent that one of the easiest ways to publicly display nationalism is at sports events, where various ethnic and social groups come together (recall the example from 1991 at Maksimir in Zagreb where an ethnic clash occurred between fan groups).

Sport contributes to social and cultural development and plays a significant role in economic and macroeconomic events. However, the increasing internationalization and globalization of sport have led to its use as a mechanism for achieving ideological, political, and financial goals.

Instead of Conclusion: The Intersection of Politics and Corruption in Sports

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The European Commission clearly identifies threats and challenges that have emerged in European sport, citing commercial pressures, exploitation of young players, doping, racism, violence, corruption, and money laundering. Gender inequality and abuse are sometimes visible in sports activities as well.

The purpose of sport is to unite and bring people and nations closer together, and this is its noble role and function. Unfortunately, some powerful figures, whether from political or business aspects, seek to diminish this primary role and function of sport and instead impose a negative role of spreading hatred, nationalism, racism, etc., through it. Instances of nationalism and racism in sports events are neither accidental nor separate from overall governance strategies.

Nationalism and racism, xenophobia and other identity-related phobias directly or indirectly, actively or by "turning a blind eye," are stimulated, sometimes even by societies themselves. This is one of the most diverse forms of mass consciousness channelling, one of the most insidious forms of corrupting people, breaking their activist and critical consciousness trying to address exploitation and imposition. It is one of the darkest ways to halt history, attempting to confront all that humanity has already fought for. Ethnic nationalism is a serious trap for the entire social system, and thus for sports as well. It is very apparent that one of the easiest ways to publicly display nationalism is at sports events, where various ethnic and social groups come together (recall the example from 1991 at Maksimir in Zagreb where an ethnic clash occurred between fan groups).

Sport contributes to social and cultural development and plays a significant role in economic and macroeconomic events. However, the increasing internationalization and globalization of sport have led to its use as a mechanism for achieving ideological, political, and material goals.

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