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CONTENTS

12.00.01 – THEORY AND HISTORY OF STATE AND LAW. HISTORY OF LEGAL DOCTRINES

ESHTURDIYEVA FARANGIZ BAKHODIR KIZI

A comparative legal analysis of national legal policy models4

12.00.05 – LABOR LAW. SOCIAL SECURITY LAW

RAKHIMOV MIRYOQUB AKTAMOVICH

Fundamental principles of labor law of the Kyrgyz Republic 13

AZIMOV AZIMBEK AZIZBEK UGLI

The importance of introducing regional “Roadmaps” in supporting youth employment ... 22

12.00.06 – THE LAW OF NATURAL RESOURCES. AGRARIAN LAW. ENVIRONMENTAL LAW

ABDUSAMADOVA ZARINA SHOBIDDIN KIZI

Legal regulation, practice, and systematic analysis of land servitude in the legislation of Uzbekistan and CIS countries 30

12.00.07 – JUDICIAL BRANCH. PROSECUTOR’S CONTROL. ORGANIZATION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT. ADVOCACY

SOBITOVA UMIDAKHON MUROD KIZI

General supervision in the mechanism of ensuring legality: the theoretical and legal aspect of prosecutorial activity 38

12.00.08 – CRIMINAL LAW. CRIMINAL-EXECUTIVE LAW

ACHILOV IZZAT TULKINOVICH

Causes of crimes against the sexual inviolability of minors and conditions contributing to their commission 46

12.00.09 – CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS. FORENSICS, INVESTIGATIVE LAW AND FORENSIC EXPERTISE

SULTONOVA LOBAR MAMARAYIM KIZI

Extradition as a mechanism of the inevitability of criminal liability 54

12.00.10 – INTERNATIONAL LAW

TILLABOEV SHOHRUKHBEK MIRZATILLO UGLI

The challenges of legal regulation of human rights in the digital age 67

12.00.12 – CORRUPTION PROBLEMS

MUSASHAYKHOV KARIMJON KHUSANXANOVICH

Analysis of corruption factors related to match-fixing in professional sports 78

AHMADJONOV MURODULLO NURALI UGLI

AI and the future of anti-corruption governance 83



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ANALYSIS OF CORRUPTION FACTORS RELATED TO MATCH-FIXING IN PROFESSIONAL SPORTS

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Abstract. *This article provides a comprehensive analysis of corruption factors associated with match-fixing in professional sports in Uzbekistan. Match-fixing is recognized as one of the most serious threats to the integrity of sports, as it undermines fair competition, damages public trust, and diminishes the social and economic value of athletic achievements. The study highlights the main causes of match-fixing, including financial instability among athletes and clubs, the tendency of players and coaches to seek illegal profits, weak monitoring and control mechanisms, and insufficient transparency within sports organizations and refereeing systems. The research methodology combines legal analysis, comparative study of international practices, and case studies of disciplinary proceedings in Uzbekistan between 2019 and 2023. Results reveal that 77 individuals, including players, referees, and coaches, were sanctioned for match-fixing while Uzbek tennis players and swimmers faced international disciplinary measures. However, sanctions remain primarily disciplinary, with no criminal liability established in national legislation. The discussion compares Uzbekistan's situation with countries such as Bulgaria, Denmark, and Germany, which criminalized match-fixing, and with the Council of Europe's Macolin Convention. The conclusion emphasizes the urgent need to introduce criminal liability, strengthen preventive mechanisms, and enhance cooperation between sports federations and law enforcement agencies.*

Keywords: *match-fixing, corruption, professional sports, sports law, transparency, prevention, ethics, criminal liability*

Introduction

The development of sports and the growing popularity of competitions have turned sports into a major source of income for athletes and organizations, making the fight against corruption in this field a pressing issue.

Centuries ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote: “Those who buy power with money become accustomed to profiting from it.” Unfortunately, his words remain relevant today.

As Gricaev and Trubitsyna (2015) note, “The danger of corruption in sports competitions is defined by the material damage caused to the state and society and by undermining the prestige of competitions based on equal opportunities for participants.”

According to UNODC, illegal betting, match-fixing, and organized crime cause an estimated 1.7 trillion USD in losses to the global sports industry annually (Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, 2021). Europol reports that criminal revenues from match-fixing linked to illegal betting reach approximately 120 million euros per year (Europol, 2020). For this reason, combating match-fixing has become a subject of active discussion in the international community. Scholars emphasize that the most urgent step is to develop legislative measures against crimes related to organizing and conducting match-fixing (Aristova & Izaak, 2013). Pilipenko (2007) warns that attempts to manipulate sports results, especially when organized internationally, pose a serious threat to the integrity of sports.

Methods

International Legal Approaches to Combating Match-Fixing

According to UNODC, by 2021, 45 jurisdictions (including the USA, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Brazil, Azerbaijan, China, France, Georgia, Germany, Italy, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, South Korea, Moldova, Portugal, Russia, Turkey, Belarus, Tajikistan, and Ukraine) had introduced criminal liability for unlawful influence on sports results (UNODC, 2021).

For example, in 2011 Bulgaria amended its Criminal Code by adding a new chapter on sports crimes, establishing liability for bribery and match-fixing (Republic of Bulgaria, 2011). In Denmark, the 2015 *Act on the Promotion of Integrity in Sport* introduced criminal liability for all forms of match manipulation. In Germany, amendments to the Criminal Code in 2017 criminalized betting fraud and manipulation of professional sports competitions (LawInSport, 2017).

The most significant international instrument is the Council of Europe’s Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions (Macolin Convention), adopted in 2014 in Magglingen, Switzerland. Article 3 defines manipulation as “an intentional act or omission aimed at unlawfully influencing the unpredictable nature of a sports competition for personal or third-party gain” (Council of Europe, 2014).

In some jurisdictions, manipulation of sports competitions is considered a matter of national importance. For instance, the High Court of Andhra Pradesh in India recognized match-fixing in cricket as a serious threat to public trust in sports (Mohammad Azharuddin v. Board of Control for Cricket in India, C.C.C.A. No. 408 of 2003).

Results

Situation in Uzbekistan

Unlike many countries, Uzbekistan has not yet introduced specific criminal liability for match-fixing. As a result, cases of manipulation in football, tennis, and swimming have been addressed only through disciplinary measures imposed by sports federations.

For example, the Disciplinary Code of the Uzbekistan Football Association (UFA), approved in 2019, establishes sanctions for bribery of referees, attempts to influence match results, and participation in fixed matches (Uzbekistan Football Association, 2019). Between 2019 and 2023, the UFA Ethics Committee sanctioned 77 individuals, including players, referees, coaches, and club officials. Sanctions included bans ranging from three months to lifetime disqualification and fines between 1 million and 50 million soums.

One notable case occurred in May 2022, when Lokomotiv players Kakhaber Makaradze, Evgeniy Kochnev, Giorgi Kvesieshvili, and Mamuka Chkadua conspired with a Chinese intermediary known as “Jay” to manipulate a Super League match against Navbahor. They ensured a 2:0 outcome and received 30,000 USD in return. Makaradze was banned for five years and fined 100 million soums, while Kochnev was banned for three years and fined 30 million soums (Uzbekistan Football Association, 2022).

Another case involved Navbahor’s former head coach, who in 2017 persuaded players to deliberately lose matches. He was fined 50 million soums and banned from football activities for five years (Gazeta.uz, 2019).

Cases in Tennis

Between 2020 and 2023, the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) sanctioned four Uzbek players for participating in match-fixing.

For example, Sanjar Fayziev was found guilty of involvement in five fixed matches, resulting in a 3.5-year ban and a fine of 15,000 USD (Kun.uz, 2023).

Similarly, Temur Ismailov participated in fixed matches in 2014, 2015, and 2019. He was fined 12,000 USD and banned for seven years. In 2021, after repeated violations, he received a lifetime ban and an additional fine of 14,000 USD (Gazeta.uz, 2020; International Tennis Integrity Agency, 2021).

Another player, Abdurasul Sultanbekov, was banned for five years and fined 8,000 USD.

These cases demonstrate that Uzbek tennis players were sanctioned under international disciplinary rules, but not prosecuted under national legislation.

Cases in Swimming

In 2022, UNODC’s *Global Report on Corruption in Sport* highlighted a case involving Uzbek swimmers. The Court of Arbitration for Sport upheld the decision of the International Swimming Federation (FINA) to annul results from the 2020 Uzbekistan Open Cup and the 2021 Uzbekistan Open Championship.

The investigation revealed that athletes Otabek Yusupboev, Eldor Usmonov, and Andrey Tarasenko had manipulated competition times to secure victories and Olympic quotas. As a result, their results were canceled, and Uzbekistan lost its qualification places for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games (Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, 2021).

General Observations

These findings show that in Uzbekistan, individuals guilty of manipulating sports results have been punished only through disciplinary measures imposed by sports federations. The absence of criminal liability prevents the development of a strong sense of responsibility among athletes, coaches, referees, and organizers.

As Peskov (2012) notes, “Match-fixing is one of the most significant threats to the development of sports.” Similarly, Polish criminologist Laskowska (2015) emphasizes that manipulation of sports results may serve not only material interests but also intangible benefits, such as enhancing personal reputation.

Discussion

International experience demonstrates stronger enforcement. Bulgaria criminalized match-fixing in 2011 (Republic of Bulgaria, 2011), Denmark in 2015, and Germany in 2017 (LawInSport, 2017). The Macolin Convention (Council of Europe, 2014) provides a multilateral framework.

In Uzbekistan, reliance on disciplinary sanctions limits effectiveness. Scholars argue that corruption in sports is sector-specific: football suffers from bribery, athletics from doping, and tennis from match-fixing (Schmidt, 2016). Laskowska (2015) notes that manipulation may serve reputational as well as financial interests.

Without criminal liability, Uzbekistan risks perpetuating impunity and weakening public trust.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that match-fixing in professional sports represents a serious corruption factor that undermines the integrity of competitions and erodes public trust in sports. In Uzbekistan, disciplinary sanctions imposed by sports federations have been the primary response to such violations. However, the absence of specific criminal liability and limited cooperation between sports organizations and law enforcement agencies significantly reduce the effectiveness of preventive measures.

International experience shows that countries introducing criminal provisions against match-fixing, such as Bulgaria, Denmark, and Germany, have strengthened accountability and deterrence. The adoption of the Council of Europe's Macolin Convention further highlights the importance of a unified international approach to combating manipulation in sports competitions.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

Introduce criminal liability for match-fixing in Uzbekistan's legislation to ensure accountability beyond disciplinary measures.

Strengthen preventive mechanisms, including transparency in sports organizations and effective monitoring systems.

Enhance cooperation between sports federations and law enforcement agencies to detect and investigate violations more effectively.

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