Odds-wise view: Whose ideas prevail in the global integrity campaigns against match-fixing?

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Abstract
The global expansion of sports betting has resulted in the formation of (inter)national governing regimes aimed at sustaining revenue and regulating attendant issues, including match-fixing. This article explores the workings of these regimes vis-à-vis the management of match-fixing issues in sport. More particularly, this article focuses on betting monitoring programmes as countermeasures against match-fixing and conceptualises these as social instruments that ultimately define issues and influence the wider integrity agenda of anti-match-fixing campaigns. Analysing documentary, observation and interview data from two disparate monitoring programmes, the results show that betting monitoring is a technical extension of corporate risk management, invariably reflecting the business interests of the betting industry. Therefore, the operating logic of betting monitoring defines match-fixing as an act of sabotaging the competitive edge of betting companies. Moreover, this interest-laden paradigm reigns within the broader policy agenda of sport integrity by equating the betting industry’s interest with that of sport. From this, the article suggests that betting monitoring plays a part in the legitimisation of commercial gambling by reframing the issue of match-fixing as a common enemy that gambling and sport join forces to combat, not a risk that gambling brings to sport.

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Introduction

In history, the expansion of gambling into sport has always engendered two issues: the promotion of gambling-related social harms; and the undermining of sport’s fundamental ‘integrity’ (Huggins, 2013; Villeneuve and Diaconu, 2011). Contemporary liberalisation of gambling and its ever-growing influence on sport have revived the same problems all around the world (Tak et al., 2018b). For example, relaxed state regulation on gambling advertising and sponsorship sees sports teams serving as a billboard for gambling promotion, normalising gambling for fans and vulnerable groups of people (McGee, 2020; Sharman, 2020). Also, excessive competition between commercial bookmakers puts increasing numbers of sports matches onto the transnational betting markets (Forrest, 2012; Nowy and Breuer, 2017), which has led to more frequent occurrences of match-fixing (Tak et al., 2018b).

This unprecedented explosion of commercial gambling is not accidental; it has coincided with changes in the global political economy (Cosgrave and Klassen, 2001). Since the global fiscal crisis during the mid-to late 20th century, governments have shifted their mode of capital accumulation from welfare state to what Cosgrave and Klassen (2009) termed ‘casino state’, utilising gambling not only as an actual tool of revenue generation, but as a major ‘organising principle’ of society (Cosgrave, 2006: 3). The legalisation of ‘sports’ betting and the easing of gambling advertising in sport is, therefore, a risk management strategy of late capitalist states (Tak, 2018). In other words, today’s increasing normalisation of gambling and match-fixing in sport is the result of the elevated status of sports gambling from a backstreet sub-culture to a state-sponsored mode of sporting consumption.

Amongst the two chronic issues, gambling-related harms have received relatively due consideration in wider sociological research. Capturing the contradictory roles of the state in providing the harmful product, as both ‘beneficiaries’ of gambling profits and ‘guardians’ of public welfare, research has pointed out how casino states reconfigured the discourses around gambling consumption to legitimise their direct promotion of gambling (Cosgrave, 2006; Young, 2010). For instance, gambling is now advanced as a means of ‘economic stimulation’ (Cosgrave, 2006) or a ‘recreational’ activity (Ramp and Badgley, 2009), while problem gambling is defined in medical terms as if it happens only to a limited number of people failing to manage themselves (Lupton, 2006; Reith, 2013). Notably, this line of literature works as a reaction to psychology’s narrow focus on ‘the problem gambler’ (Young and Markham, 2015: 7). Sociological approaches have thus provided useful conceptualisations of the ‘legitimating regimes’ (Levy, 2010: 209) that run and rationalise the ‘problem industry’ (Young and Markham, 2015: 7).

In contrast, match-fixing, as one of the ‘side-effects’ of commercial gambling, has garnered comparatively little attention in the sociological inquiry of sport. In the absence of sociological research, the issue of match-fixing has been predominantly framed by the stakeholders as an ‘ethical issue’ (sport governing bodies), a ‘financial crime’ (gambling
industry) or ‘a means of more serious criminal activities’ (law enforcement agencies) in much the same way gambling consumption is increasingly defined in economic, leisure and medical terms (Tak et al., 2018b). While these practical approaches have put forth enforceable remedies for the problem, more theoretical questions remain as to the form of governance ‘casino states’ create over the way in which sport is consumed – that is, how legalised sports betting maintains its legitimacy in the face of its attendant problem of match-fixing.

Tak et al.’s (2018a) political sociology approach provides a clue. They suggest that the legalisation of sports betting results in governing regimes consisting mainly of governments, betting operators and sports organisations (Tak et al., 2018a). Just as casino states perform a contradictory role in relation to public health issues of gambling (Young, 2010), this ‘sports-betting regime’ not only oversees the supply of the sports gambling service (and secures revenues), but it also manages the attendant issues because match-fixing is a risk to the regime’s revenue generation as well as to its social legitimacy. For that reason, Tak et al. (2018a) illuminated match-fixing countermeasures not only as solutions to the issue, but as strategies to protect the political and business stakes of the regime.

This article builds on this political sociology view with particular focus on betting monitoring. The reason for this focus is because betting monitoring is mostly conducted and provided by the betting industry which engages in various regulatory regimes nationally and internationally. Hence, by focusing on more private, commercial interests operating across national boundaries, this paper aims to conceptualise the industry-led (inter)national campaigns against match-fixing. In exploring the industry’s monitoring, this article examines how the technological solution for match-fixing defines, shapes and otherwise institutionalises the contours of the match-fixing problem. Analysing the operating logics and data interpretations of two different betting monitoring programmes, we reveal what is considered normal, desirable, irregular, risky, and problematic in the commercial bookmaking industry. We then show how such industry-driven conceptions of the problem influence the broader integrity agenda of anti-match-fixing movements across the globe.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. The next section offers a brief review of previous approaches to match-fixing countermeasures, which leads to a political sociology approach that informs the analysis of this study. This is followed by an overview of match-fixing monitoring systems currently in place, with particular focus on the policy frameworks in which they sit and operate. After a short description of our methodological approach, we present key findings in three separate sections. Finally, the article concludes by discussing the potential implications of our political sociology approach for the sociological studies of match-fixing and gambling, as well as for the global efforts into combatting match-fixing.

**Political sociology approach to match-fixing and its countermeasures**

The most common understanding of match-fixing countermeasures can be seen in popular discourse in the media: they are a functional means to solving the issue of match-
fixing. From this pragmatic perspective, the measures are neutral devices developed from
a value-free diagnosis of the problem (Howlett, 2004). For instance, education pro-
grammes are based on the recognition that there is a lack of awareness of the risks that
come with the involvement in match-fixing in sport (Sorbonne-ICSS, 2014; Tzeng and
Lee, 2021). Criminalisation of match-fixing was achieved by evidence that match-fixing
had been associated with more serious organised crime (Haberfeld and Sheehan, 2013;
Hill, 2015). Likewise, various collaborative inter-national/sectoral frameworks have
emerged from the case reports that match-fixers operate across different domains and
national boundaries (Boniface et al., 2012; Forrest, 2013). On the surface, this function-
alist view depicts rational processes of policy instrumentation and concerted efforts
amongst all stakeholders.

However, this perspective sidesteps the question of cui bono (whose interests?) despite
different groups of interests involved in the formulation and implementation of match-
fixing remedies. According to Lascoumes and Le Galès (2007), policy instruments not
only have functional elements (e.g. measurement, calculation, delivery, categorisation,
etc.); they more importantly exercise social technologies of creating ‘a particular
representation of the issue at stake’ (p. 10). In this light, even seemingly innocent aca-
demic discussions of the problem’s causes (e.g. athletes, malicious criminals, or poor
governance of sport or gambling) and resultant countermeasures have different connota-
tions of where more responsibility lies (Tak et al., 2018b). In other words, match-fixing
remedies constitute a contested terrain where different interpretations of the problem
compete and negotiate. Such a political sociology approach brings about the question
of whose ideas prevail in counter-match-fixing campaigns.

Informed by Lascoumes and Le Galès’s (2007) approach, Tak et al. (2018a) conducted
an empirical analysis of three key match-fixing remedies in South Korea. According to
their findings, education programmes reformulate the notion of sport ethics, not for
sport’s own sake, but to remodel sport as a provider of ‘pristine’ matches for betting,
while monitoring programmes exert the effect of ‘empowering’ the traditionally stigma-
tised business of sports betting as a legitimate policy actor (Tak et al., 2018a). From the
findings, the authors suggest that the fight against match-fixing not only works for the
resolution of the problem, but also serves as legitimating strategies for the controversial
enterprise of sports betting.

Although this risk-management strategy is observed across the globe, Tak et al.’s
(2018a) study investigated a top-down, state-monopoly system where the government
has much stronger control and influence over the operation. Therefore, their findings
cannot fully capture what happens in the global context where commercial gambling pro-
viders adopt much more entrepreneurial roles. Indeed, commercial betting operators not
only offer education and betting monitoring programmes for sports organisations and law
enforcement agencies, but they are co-opted into almost all key global initiatives
and expert panels for specialist inputs into the tightening of legal sanctions against
match-fixing (e.g. the UK Gambling Commission, the Group of Copenhagen,
International Olympic Committee (IOC’s) Integrity Betting Intelligence System, etc.).
For example, the ‘wagering sector’ was consulted in the formation of Australia’s
280-page integrity manifesto (Department of Health, 2018). Hence, this article extends
the question of whose ideas prevail towards more global contexts to examining how it works for the expansion of the global gambling industry.

More particularly, we focus on betting monitoring which is run and supplied by those in the gambling industry. In analysing this monitoring, we consider the embedded interests within the technology-based policy tool. This is because, as Zuboff (2019) stresses, ‘technology is not and never can be a thing in itself, isolated from economics and society’ (p. 14). Hence, there needs to be a clearer appreciation of the social and economic forces that animate the technologies. In this study, therefore, we differentiate the commercial imperatives of the betting industry from technological necessity, and further suggest that they are currently conflated within the operating logic of monitoring programmes. The next section provides a brief outline of match-fixing monitoring systems in place.

**Match-fixing monitoring at play**

Betting-pattern monitoring (betting monitoring) has become institutionalised as a key element of match-fixing countermeasures (cf. Forrest and McHale, 2019; Fuestel and Rodenberg, 2015). While such monitoring refers to a fairly technical practice of analysing betting patterns, it is operationalised according to wider ‘match-fixing monitoring’ protocols, including: (a) detecting irregular betting patterns by algorithm-based programmes; (b) reviewing and follow-up by internal experts (odds traders); and (c) reporting to affiliated sports and law enforcement entities according to the review results (Forrest and McHale, 2015). Within collaborative anti-match-fixing frameworks comprising various actors from betting, sport and law enforcement areas, the reported information leads to further investigation and disciplinary action by sport governing bodies, as well as legal prosecution by law enforcement agencies where necessary. Thus, while this paper focuses mainly on betting monitoring, it is also necessary to consider the wider institutional arrangements within which the monitoring technology sits and operates.

Betting monitoring first appeared in the late 1990s (see GLMS, 2019). European Lottery (EL), the association of state-sanctioned operators in Europe, launched a voluntary information-sharing framework, named ‘Matchinfo’ in 1999, which later developed into the European Lottery Monitoring System (ELMS) in 2005 (GLMS, 2019). As the World Lottery Association (WLA) was formed as a more global coalition of state operators, ELMS merged itself into a global version, Global Lottery Monitoring System (GLMS). In commercial bookmaking, the International Betting Integrity Association (IBIA) is one of the earliest organisations offering match-fixing monitoring. Initially set up in 2005 as European Sport Security Association (ESSA), the monitoring body has expanded its membership to include many well-known betting operators, such as Bet365, Ladbrokes, Bwin and DraftKings (IBIA, 2020).

Another type of match-fixing monitoring consists of those run by betting service providers such as Genius Sports and Sportradar. These commercial entities provide a package of integrity services, comprising everything related to integrity (e.g. education programmes, e-learning tutorials, reviewing clients’ integrity strategies, monitoring technologies, etc.). The integrity service is not their core business area but has developed out
of their dealings with both sports and betting data (Holden and Schuster, 2019). Indeed, these services lend themselves to monitoring match-fixing for three reasons. First, data companies receive a live feed of odds from their member bookmakers. Second, they also collect sports match data through their data journalists and freelancers, which makes them accessible to local information (Forrest and McHale, 2015). Third, their pre-existing partner sport governing bodies can work as a supply route for their monitoring programmes.

These monitoring bodies in the betting market work in partnership with sport governing bodies (the IOC, The Union of European Football Associations, Tennis Integrity Unit, etc.), (inter)national regulatory bodies (the UK Gambling Commission, the Group of Copenhagen, etc.) and law enforcement agencies (Interpol, Europol, Victoria Police in Australia, etc.) at both national and international levels. At an international level of governance, the Council of Europe Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions (Macolin Convention) is a legal framework developed to facilitate cooperation between public authorities and relevant stakeholders in sport and betting industries. Therefore, its supporting networks such as the ‘Macolin Community’ and the Council of Europe’s Network of National Platforms (the Group of Copenhagen) include various monitoring bodies mentioned above. Nationally, the Sports Betting Intelligence Unit (SBIU) within the UK Gambling Commission serves as ‘an intelligence hub for key integrity stakeholders’, including sports organisations, licensed bookmakers, overseas regulators, and monitoring bodies to share suspicious activities and concerns in both sectors (Gambling Commission, 2020b).

There seems to be considerable overlap between the members of different regulatory networks, linking all stakeholders around the issue of match-fixing (Forrest and McHale, 2015) and maximising the reach of monitoring coverage. For example, the monitoring bodies’ annual reports underscore their achievements with the number of matches they monitor per year, and how many are classified as suspicious matches by, for example, sporting disciplines and geographical regions (ESSA, 2018; Stats Perform, 2019). Often, confirmed cases alerted by the monitoring bodies are used as evidence in legal prosecution or in the Court of Arbitration for Sport (Kerr, 2017).

However, the policy architecture of these integrity initiatives brings together various actors from different policy areas (sport, betting and law enforcement), sectors (public and private) and levels (national and international), all of which have a stake in the enterprise of sports gambling. In such intermediary networks, there is ample room for private interests to promote their own agendas within seemingly non-profit, neutral partnerships. For instance, the IBIA legally operates as a non-profit organisation (IBIA, 2020), yet its directors and members consist almost entirely of private bookmakers offering bets for profits. Thus, it understandably has ‘a clear focus on protecting its members’ businesses’ as its chief executive officer (CEO) confirms (Gaming Intelligence, 2019). Providing integrity services can also be understood in this light – for transnational (hence stateless) private bookmakers, joining such an integrity body can distinguish themselves as legitimate bookmakers that are licensed somewhere in the world. Therefore, the nature of betting monitoring needs to be conceptualised and understood against this political context.
Methods

This study employed a case study approach to the world of match-fixing monitoring (Simons, 1996). Specifically, the study focuses on two disparate monitoring programmes: (a) a widely known international monitoring body in collaboration with many leading sport governing bodies; and (b) a monitoring start-up trying to expand its service. The two programmes were selected in consideration of accessibility and increased source credibility. Access to monitoring entities is difficult, especially if one tries to interrogate anything beyond what is available to the general public and policy makers for promotional purposes. After a request for observation and interview was refused by a major monitoring provider, we went by way of a public organisation in partnership with another major monitoring entity as a gatekeeper and eventually acquired access. Given that different market statuses and commercial stakes are likely to render different modes of operation and business perspectives, we additionally employed another case of a start-up monitoring programme to cross-check (dis)similarities.

The study utilised three qualitative techniques for data collection, including participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and critical document analysis. Primary data sources were collected through observation and interview in the two monitoring programmes. For the major monitoring body, the lead author visited its operating centre in Europe in September 2019. The lead author observed the work of monitoring personnel, documenting how betting lines were monitored and managed, how irregular patterns appeared on screen, and how their experts responded. A three-hour interview was also conducted during the visit with its monitoring manager. For the independent programme, the lead and second authors maintained a dialogue with the developer based in North America over 4 months. A total of five online interviews were held from September to December 2019 where the authors sought technical and statistical explanations of the monitoring mechanism for two hours on average. After every interview, the two authors had separate follow-up meetings to ensure technological understandings of the monitoring programmes and generate discussion points in line with the research purpose. All six interviews (one on-site and five online) were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis by the lead author. The two informants, involved in the development and operation of the two monitoring systems, had experiences as odds traders over 10 years. The first informant (Informant A) worked for one of the major European betting companies, while the other informant (Informant B) worked for four different major bookmakers in Europe and Asia.

To gain knowledge of common features of contemporary monitoring, we additionally consulted secondary sources, such as academic literature and policy reports that have examined other monitoring programmes (e.g. Forrest and McHale, 2015; Van Rompuy, 2015). Hence, although primary data is mostly about the two different programmes, the results presented in this article are not particular to the programmes, but general to other systems currently in place. Given the critical nature of this article, all names have been anonymised in case the general features described here may harm the reputation of the particular monitoring programmes and their operating bodies.

Finally, critical document analysis was performed with respect to any available texts regarding the match-fixing monitoring systems, including commissioned research.
projects, organisation reports, media articles and policy documents. Critical readings of documents served two purposes in this research (Grimley, 1986). Firstly, to obtain verifiable knowledge, facts and figures in any relevant texts were crosschecked and triangulated with interview and observation data. Obtained knowledge at an early stage informed the construction of interview questions, while interview transcripts were reflected upon the documents at later stages. Secondly, given the various interests involved in betting monitoring, texts were read as ‘discourses’, considering who produced them, for whom they were presented, and for what reasons (Edwards and Skinner, 2009).

Data were analysed in a theoretically informed manner (Danermark et al., 2002). Rather than a purely inductive or data-driven process, the political sociology approach served as a lens to process the empirical data, allowing us to remain receptive to challenges and new insights from the empirics. Data analysis was structured into several rounds of interpretation. First, after multiple readings of the transcriptions and document summaries, the lead author formulated pre-designed data units, from technical, financial to political, social aspects of the monitoring (e.g. odds-making and changing, risk-margin links, organisational considerations and priorities, the betting market landscape, debates in counter-match-fixing movements, etc). The second author, with expertise in data science, reviewed the first two units to confirm the mathematical logicality in the inference from the technical to financial aspects of monitoring. Second, the lead author perused the transcripts again, focusing this time on ‘interest-laden’ remarks to map the technical/financial explanations onto political/social interests, producing interim arguments. Third, these arguments were then evaluated independently by the lead author and the third author in terms of how the technical explanations and inside perspectives fall into, contest or advance the theoretical assumptions. After refining the arguments based on the peer discussions, the lead author finally interwove relevant information threads in different data units with the political sociology assumptions to generate accessible accounts that address the research questions. These accounts are now presented in the following sections.

**Odds-wise view of match-fixing**

The main task of betting monitoring is odds tracking (Forrest and McHale, 2019; Kerr, 2017). The reason is because odds, like share market prices, function as an index of where bets are invested. Odds change according to demand (Feustel and Rodenberg, 2015). When bets are concentrated on a certain, likely event, bookmakers respond by lowering the odds to drive away the concentrated investment, while raising odds on unpopular events to attract investment (Forrest and McHale, 2015). This is called ‘balancing’ or ‘balanced book’; a risk-hedging practice by which bookmakers can evenly distribute the investment across entire outcomes so that they can earn a certain margin whatever results occur. With the balanced book, bookmakers (a) attract more customers by providing appealing odds; (b) secure profits; and (c) trace punter’s investment patterns. Thus, balanced book enables bookmakers to keep track of betting patterns (seen in odds changes) and raise a red flag when there are no reasonable explanations for irregular patterns.
The following sections present the underlying logic of betting monitoring, and how this logic shapes the definition of match-fixing as a problem. The investigation focuses on football (soccer) betting monitoring simply because it is the most popular sport in betting markets, and accordingly, more monitoring programmes have been developed in relation to football (Forrest and McHale, 2019; Gambling Commission, 2020a).

**Betting pattern monitoring – a technical extension of risk management in odds trading**

To understand the mechanism of betting monitoring, we need to begin with how betting odds are set and change. According to Informant B, betting odds are formulated through a process of reaching market consensus: from odds traders’ personal evaluation to market testing and adjustment. Odds making starts by traders’ individual work with their own ‘power ranking’ table. Although mathematical models such as a Poisson regression and Elo system are used to figure out each team’s past performance (Forrest and McHale, 2015), Informant B said, statistical models only work as ‘a base coat of painting’. This is because there are too many variables to consider in predicting a match result (e.g. weather, starting line-ups, home/away, reserve). Accordingly, it is the qualitative judgement of traders, based on experience and various statistical data (e.g. on target shot) that produces the initial odds. To compensate for the relatively subjective evaluation, however, betting companies have a team of three or four odds traders working together to agree on consensus prices for each league. Traders make constant corrections to initial odds to reflect up-to-date information regarding the league and teams (e.g. overall motivation, injuries, weather changes, etc.).

However, such in-house consensus is a mere ‘candle in the wind’ of transnational betting markets. Odds traders mostly follow the odds of mega bookmakers in the Southeast Asian market. Informant B likens betting markets to financial markets:

> The thing is, if my odds are different from the odds coming up in the Philippines, we just follow theirs with no second thought. The reason for doing so is that their odds are moving according to confident investment by successful gamblers. Imagine that you think the pound-dollar exchange rate is 1.2, but Goldman Sachs says it’s 1.5, then no matter how confident you are, you have no choice but to go for... about 1.4, because you believe they might know something important. So, the whole world is following the most influential market, say Wall Street for the international oil price, and Asian market for football betting. (Informant B)

This hedging is perhaps because of the market mechanism of odds trading: ‘when you go against the market, you could be either a hero or broke with overwhelming chances of becoming the latter, but if you go with the flow, you won’t get blamed for the loss’ (Informant B). Traders simply do not want to take risks. However, a more crucial reason for following Southeast Asian odds is, as Informant B stressed above, the belief that ‘they might know something important’. In other words, odds making and changing hinge on the expectations about information. When it is believed that someone has information, odds move to defend losses. Most actors in the betting market believe it is not pure chance, but the advantages from information asymmetry that determine the winners.
Odds continue to change even after being offered in the market. Informant B says odds grow more confident in trading, from weak to strong odds. For instance, when odds traders are not confident about the odds they make (due mainly to a lack of knowledge about the match), the odds are called a ‘tissue line’. Such weak lines are shaken immediately after they are released because traders make constant adjustments to the odds (i.e. balancing) depending on where bets are placed. At this initial stage, traders test (or taste) the response of punters with low risks by limiting maximum amounts of money per bet. Going through such a tug-of-war with punters, odds progress into what is called a ‘solid line’ nearing 50:50 probabilities with which bookmakers will not lose in any case. In this regard, solid betting lines (odds) are a result of market consensus (between bookmakers and punters).

In this way, today’s ‘balanced book’ enables bookmakers to secure margin without risk. Before the internet era, bookmakers hardly changed odds, which meant bookmakers also had to gamble (Munting, 1996). When an unexpected result occurred, bookmakers could have lost their money. Today, however, internet technology and the introduction of live betting provide opportunities for bookmakers to spread risks by adjusting odds in real time to respond to market investment (Hosmer-Henner, 2010). In this sense, contemporary odds making and trading is fundamentally an act of risk-management, which reflects the business interests of betting companies (who are attempting to profit in all situations).

To this end, betting monitoring is technically nothing more than reviewing the record of the balanced book (i.e. odds tracking). For instance, monitoring programmes issue warnings when betting limits are hit several times, which does not necessarily signal match-fixing, but implies that the betting lines are still weak for balanced book and risk management. That is, warnings signal risks for bookmakers be it related to match-fixing or not. Seen in this way, match-fixing monitoring is just an extended function of bookmakers’ risk-management activities, developing from contemporary odds trading technologies. Because of the criticality of odds information, we conceptualise this risk management approach as an ‘odds-wise’ view – a perspective emphasising the primacy of the betting industry’s interests.

Match-fixing: ‘known unknowns’ debilitating bookmakers’ house edge

Clearly, there is high premium on information in sports betting for both punters and betting companies alike. As sports betting is all about predicting the results of future events which are distant in time and space, information to fill the space–time gaps needs regulation – be it disclosed in due course (e.g. starting line-ups) or concealed (individual players’ injury conditions). Betting odds in the market reflects the value of information. As previously described, when odds are changing according to where bets are concentrated, it is information that determines the direction of bets. One easy example might be the case where odds show sharp changes as soon as starting line-ups (one of the key pieces of information for betting) are announced. Information about the match reshapes punters’ predictions (and expectations) about the likelihood of certain events, which in turn leads to changes in investment patterns.

Information for betting can be divided into two types: (1) public information and (2) non-public information. Public information refers to information that is open to
everyone, such as starting line-ups and goal scores. Almost all punters make use of such information to make informed decisions for their investment. Some punters go the extra mile to obtain non-public information (e.g. which players are in good form or suffering any personal problems), which constitutes a competitive edge in the betting markets.

Bookmakers have this competitive edge in their trade with individual punters. This is basically because commercial bookmakers have experts (odds traders). But more importantly, bookmakers have access to non-public information based on their intimate business relations with sports organisations. Informant A confirmed that odds traders are in regular contact with domestic sports organisations to check on details about sports matches they organise. An even more important reason for bookmakers’ competitive edge comes from their customer profiling. Informant A illuminates that customer profiling is basically to ‘protect their business’. He went on to say: ‘[odds traders are] sitting there identifying all losing bets and where we lost bets, and if you can see somebody winning big, you want to avoid that’.

According to Informant B, bookmakers hunt down customers’ bets in two respects: (a) who places bets and (b) where the bets are placed. First, ‘Who places bets’ is about identifying and managing ‘big market players’. Big players are ‘big’ not only because they bet large amounts of money, but more importantly because they tend to win the bets and can bring ‘big’ losses to bookmakers. Most traders attribute the success of big players not to thorough analysis, but to good sources of information – ‘somehow they know something’. Therefore, once listed as ‘big market players’, their betting directions serve as information sources for the bookmakers. Simply put, bookmakers monitor where ‘major players’ bet and use that information for odds trading. Second, bookmakers also pay attention to the geo-location of bets. Even if bets were not placed by ‘big players’, unusual bets from particular areas are put under additional scrutiny. This is especially the case when bets come from areas in which either team is based, as bookmakers surmise there might be local information circulating in the area.

As such, bookmakers utilise information from punters for their own odds trading (hence for risk management) because bookmakers value the ‘unknown information’ behind the punters’ investments – that is, ‘they might know something important’. However, it should be noted that bookmakers do not care about the root sources (where the punters get the information from). The only thing that bookmakers care about is the reliability of the information, which is reflected in the confidence of the investment (bets). To the extent that the confidence is proven (e.g. bets from big players or relevant regions), bookmakers rather take advantage of the information. This is because such information constitutes the very competitive edge that they cannot afford to forego within the prediction market.

The only time bookmakers care about ‘unknown information’ is when it seems to be damaging their competitive edge – unexplainable, unusual large amounts of bets. This ‘known unknown’ investment creates information asymmetry against bookmakers because although the investment signals that the punter knows something important about the match, the bookmakers cannot figure out how confident the investment is (and hence cannot exploit it). In other words, bookmakers are themselves subject to a sheer gambling situation. This is where betting monitoring intervenes to evaluate how
suspicious the investment is – the fuzzy boundary between risk-management and match-fixing monitoring.

That is, in the odds-wise view, what matters is not whether a match is fixed or not (and whether match-fixing is right or wrong), but whether that information on the match is known to bookmakers or not. Within this system of interpretations, therefore, match-fixing is defined as an act of incapacitating the bookmakers’ competitive edge over punters. In the strictest sense, this does not mean on-field match-fixing conducted by abetted players because even though match-fixing takes place, it is of no concern to bookmakers unless it harms their business interests. By contrast, even if there were no on-field match-fixing, unidentifiable betting patterns can come as a formidable enemy because they can paralyse the very mechanism of their profit generation.

This accurately mirrors the risk management effort of the odds-wise view. As match-fixing is defined as a risk to the bookmaking business, what needs to be done is to recover a risk-free competitive edge. The ethical view of match-fixing with which we are familiar is added later in the political process of ensuring the risk-free business environment. In the following section, we discuss how the interests-laden idea in a specific policy solution feeds into broader policy agenda of sport integrity.

**Odds-wise view within the global agenda of sport integrity**

As described above, match-fixing monitoring is an extended version of risk-management. In that regard, the odds-wise view of betting monitoring defines match-fixing as debiliting the house edge of betting operators over punters. If that is the case, it might be easy to assume that the interests of betting that underlie the odds-wise view can operate in some way within the anti-match-fixing movements because betting monitoring is a key part of those initiatives. Indeed, some strands of match-fixing studies appear to be in line with the odds-wise view of betting operators. For instance, Forrest (2012, 2013) defines match-fixing as a financial crime that defrauds betting markets and points to betting operators and punters as primary victims of the crime.

When it comes to policy making, the ‘problem’s’ definition constitutes a contested terrain because how an issue is constructed and perceived ultimately steers the selection of solutions (Rochefort and Cobb, 1993). In this light, the betting industry’s interpretive model of match-fixing appears in sharp relief with that of sports organisations, which focus on moral and ethical aspects of the problem (Moriconi and Almeida, 2019). By contrast, the betting industry rarely foregrounds the odds-wise view and the business interest behind its problem definition. Instead, the industry arguably tries to equate their business interests with the interests of sport and of the general public. For instance, the CEO of Kindred Group which owns major bookmakers (e.g. Unibet, 32Red) stated when launching a sport integrity project, ‘Fair Sport for All’: ‘Match-fixing is also a threat to the gambling industry. If people lose faith in the honesty of sports events, they will lose faith in betting products as well’ (iGamingBusiness, 2020). In this way, the betting industry’s narrative advances a common interest (as victims), a common enemy (match-fixing), and a common policy position in protecting ‘the integrity of the underlying sporting events from corruptors’ (Holden, 2019: 380).
This identification, however, causes confusion around the now ubiquitous concept of ‘integrity’ (UNESCO 2020; Loyens et al., 2021): Are integrity policies there to protect betting interests or to safeguard sport? The prohibition on disclosing inside information serves as a case in point. This regulation has been introduced to many countries and sports leagues with the aim of protecting ‘sport integrity’ (i.e. preventing match-fixing). For instance, in 2019, Australian cricketer Emily Smith was banned for posting her team line-up on Instagram one hour ahead of the official announcement (The Guardian, 2019). This disciplinary action, however, is not about regulating any on-field actions, but about potential influences on punters’ betting investment. Controlling such information, therefore, is a basic condition for protecting the competitive edge of betting operators, hence, a conception that is closer to ‘integrity for betting (operators)’. The reason why the timing of releasing starting line-ups matters is only because, as depicted in the Cricket Australia’s Anti-corruption Code that Emily Smith is alleged to have breached, ‘such disclosure might lead to the information being used in relation to betting especially in the match-day market in this case, and cause financial damages to bookmakers (The Guardian, 2019).

Arguably then, sport integrity and betting integrity are mutually exclusive in principle. According to Informant B, ‘sport integrity can be put at risk without betting’. There are many different motivations that violate the integrity of sport. Betting is just one of them. Likewise, there are other ways to breach betting integrity without tainting sport integrity. Informant B explains that betting integrity is breached when ‘someone monopolises information that can disturb the betting markets’ such as where ‘you don’t disclose information necessary for betting, or you give an indication that you’re benching starting players, but you actually field them’ (Informant B). Put another way, what betting monitoring cares about is not sport integrity, but the breach of betting integrity – the existence of ‘known unknown’ for bookmakers. In this respect, betting integrity is an inextricably intertwined concept with the interest of the betting industry because it refers to qualities that are not necessary for sporting competitions per se, but only required for the offering of sport as a gambling product.

What makes it difficult to distinguish the two concepts is the fact that they very often overlap in practice. In the typical form of betting-related match-fixing, match-fixers not only abet players to manipulate the on-field progress of sports matches (breaching sport integrity), but also paralyse the competitive edge of bookmakers by monopolising the information of how the match will unfold (breaching betting integrity). This intersection provides room for the betting industry’s problem definition of the issue (betting integrity) to be conflated with the traditional, ethical notion of sport integrity (cf. Cleret et al., 2015). Inasmuch as the betting industry can rely on the untouchable concept of sport integrity and engages in the operation of betting monitoring in the name of protecting sport integrity, the betting industry is hardly questioned about the business interests involved in anti-match-fixing initiatives. Put differently, the betting industry pursues the realisation of betting integrity under the guise of the more widely acceptable concept of sport integrity.

This betting-centred view of match-fixing, and by extension, its interpretation of integrity allows for the protection of sport integrity to be left to the business interests of betting. For instance, in the US, state authorities’ permission for betting events was supposedly
based on the sporting events’ vulnerability to integrity risks. Balsam (2020) suggests that this ‘protective’ measure was relaxed when the Covid-19 pandemic brought a halt to American sport, allowing formerly vulnerable sporting events to be offered on their betting markets. This illustrates how betting revenues can be prioritised over ‘integrity’ when betting’s interests, not those of sport, reign in the regulation of the issue.

The concept of betting integrity, mixed up with sporting integrity, has also enabled substantial enforcement power – the criminalisation of match-fixing. For instance, the Council of Europe Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions (also known as the Macolin Convention) prescribes that signatory nations ‘criminally sanction’ match-fixing in their domestic laws (Council of Europe, 2014). Many countries (e.g. Germany, India, South Korea, Sweden and Switzerland) have introduced or revised relevant legislation for more efficient criminal penalties (Balsam, 2020). Behind incriminating match-fixing lies the popular antipathy against it, and the endeavour of law enforcement agencies trying to catch other serious criminal activities involved in match-fixing (e.g. money laundering and organised crime) (Husting et al., 2012). However, this is closely linked with the profitability of the state-sanctioned business in that without criminal penalties for any acts of disturbing the ‘legitimate’ enterprise, the sports-betting regimes may not secure the benefits sought by deregulating the potentially harmful industry. Consequently, as match-fixing becomes a criminal offence beyond a mere sporting issue, the betting industry is put in a favourable position to realise its interests. This is because the law enforcement power involved in the anti-match-fixing campaigns provides public resources for regulating the sports betting market. Informant B offers a compelling explanation:

If there are insurance frauds, then insurance companies will be in danger because they will have financial losses. So, if the police or the public prosecutors can investigate them, that will help … In the betting companies’ position, if they got the information about match-fixing, they would make money. Or even if somebody else fixed, they could make money by that [using the information to adjust odds]. But if somebody fixes but they have no idea? Then they will screw up. So, they may claim to get rid of match-fixing for social justice on the face of it. But in reality, it is also about protecting themselves. (Informant B)

As such, the betting industry’s odds-wise view of risk management has not only reformulated the ideas associated with sporting ethics, but also helped acquire a much-needed enforcement power. The odds-wise view, which translates all market information into odds (hence potential margins and financial risks), prevails as an underlying rationale for the realisation of such ideational and material enactment of the interests of the betting industry. This is unsurprising given that betting’s monetary gains constitute the foundational material resources for the entire sports-betting regimes. Sports reform themselves to become sought-after gambling events to benefit from betting revenues, while governments need the authority to imprison swindlers to prevent any crisis in legitimacy potentially caused by the expansion of legal sports gambling (Tak et al., 2018a). In this sense, the odds-wise view’s predominance does not necessarily mean the betting industry’s reigning over sport or governmental sectors. However, given that the reorganisation
of ideas and resources around sport is carried out in a way to secure gambling profits, the odds-wise view does not work solely to the benefit of the betting industry, but to the benefit of sports-betting regimes as a whole.

**Discussion and conclusion**

This article has analysed the origins and sources of betting monitoring’s operating logic. In doing so, it has also examined how this odds-wise view defines the issue of match-fixing and its influence on the formulation of the policy agenda of sport integrity. The results show that betting monitoring is a technical extension of bookmakers’ risk-hedging tactics in their odds trading (i.e. profit-making). From this, we have suggested that the operation of betting monitoring and its underlying assumptions about match-fixing are inseparable from the interests of bookmakers. This is supported in how bookmakers define the problem of match-fixing: as an act of damaging the competitive edge of bookmakers in their trading with general punters. The main concern of bookmakers is not match-fixing itself (sport integrity), but whether it disturbs their business (betting integrity). We conclude this paper by discussing several implications of these findings for the study of match-fixing and gambling as well as the significance of sociological research on the issues.

First, we have empirically disclosed that monitoring uses the same operational logic as the ‘balanced book’. If the balanced book is a defence mechanism against financial risks from incomplete information, betting monitoring is a more active reaction towards such risks. While it is well known that match-fixing causes financial damages to betting companies, we have detailed how sporting information and resultant punters’ investment are translated into odds, and subsequently, interpreted as ‘risk or margin’ in the betting market. This constant tug-of-war over profit margin illustrates match-fixing is more than it seems: it is an outcome of the battle between gamblers (odds-traders versus punters), which often spills over into manipulating sporting events for the certainty of information.

In addition, by locating the odds-wise view and agenda within the context of counter-match-fixing initiatives, we have shown how this view mobilises sport ‘integrity’ and the repressive power of criminalisation into the realisation of its risk-management imperative. This odds-wise view (as a dominant system of interpretation) empirically supports Tak et al.’s (2018a) argument that match-fixing countermeasures serve as a legitimating strategy for sports-betting regimes. Our findings further present specific legitimating strategies, such as aligning/allying the interest of betting with that of sport.

Our observation that sport integrity is reconfigured into something that is closer to betting integrity reveals the fundamental nature of the match-fixing countermeasures and counter-match-fixing movements. Indeed, most measures are targeted at preventing sport and sporting individuals from being exploited as puppets by corrupt gamblers. However, this new ethic of ‘betting integrity’ does not intend to stop sporting events and individuals from playing the puppet for betting; rather, the new ethic transforms them into a more reliable puppet for betting. Such a revelation, together with the detailed profit-maximising activities in odds-trading, provides a foothold for more critical
approaches beyond what research can obtain from betting stakeholders’ official standpoint beset with industry agendas, and microperspectives of convicted individuals in sport and betting.

We also suggest that our findings contribute to the sociological literature on gambling-related harms. Given that ‘casino states’ emerged as a way to fill the fiscal deficit amidst a global financial crisis, betting operators’ financial risk management is part of the casino states’ accumulation however little it may be. In this regard, we have added an account of how the casino state rationalises its production and promotion of risky consumption in sport. Just as the ‘industry-government gambling complex’ funds responsible-gambling campaigns to alleviate the issue of problem gambling (Young and Markham, 2015), the sports-betting regime finances anti-match-fixing campaigns to fend off potential criticisms of their negative influence on sport. Likewise, just as the former complex overcomes the legitimacy crisis by downloading the responsibility onto individual gamblers, the sports-betting regime shifts the blame to individual athletes (Tak, 2018). Furthermore and as our findings suggest, the sports-betting regime combines the interests of sport and betting to shift the frame of match-fixing: from a problem that gambling brings to sport, to a problem that gambling and sport join forces to combat.

Such a legitimation strategy takes sociological studies of ‘big gambling’ beyond the problem definition of the industry (Markham and Young, 2015). As discussed in the problem gambling literature, without a comprehension of the political economy around the industry, academic research runs the risk of being captured by the business agenda (Young, 2013). The same is true of match-fixing research. The practical approach’s close engagement with industry is likely to represent their interest-laden, legitimating discourses, which can be regarded as ‘performing unrecognised political acts’ of justifying the status quo (Young, 2013: 17). Indeed, the dominant literature on match-fixing focuses more on problem individuals (puppets) than on the provision of risk by the sports-betting regimes (puppet masters). As a result, the stakeholders benefiting from sports betting have hardly been visible and challenged about the appropriateness of their business. This paper has put the regime itself into question by examining the social technologies of how this problematic business is organised and legitimised – an integral dimension to the workings of casino states.

One final caveat to add is that the public agenda for sport integrity and private interests involved in its delivery are simultaneous and not contradictory to one another in real life. While this paper argues that betting’s interests heavily influence the global anti-match-fixing movements, it is not our intention to deny the betting industry’s contribution towards the actual prevention of match-fixing. Instead, we have suggested the need for a more political conceptualisation and nuanced understanding of these social processes and relations. Indeed, because social actors’ interests can never be completely separated from their social practices, there always remains room for interpretation, and ultimately, to what extent the pursuit of interests can be justified is a key concern of political sociology (Peters, 2002). Thus, within the public project to safeguard ethics in sport, it is important to dissect the inherent stakes within the project and unpack the ideational building blocks of policy agendas, problem definitions and policy solutions that underpin its development and governance.
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