UNESCO Convention on Doping  
Monday 5 February 2007

Distinguished guests,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Mr. Joseph S. Blatter, President of FIFA, we thank you for the honourable invitation to this important conference. As Mr. Blatter could not come personally due to his commitments he asked me to represent him and FIFA, as I have been responsible for developing strategies and performing programmes in the fight against doping in football since 1994 when the FIFA World Cup in the United States was overshadowed by the positive case of Diego Maradona who was immediately suspended and later sanctioned for 18 months for the intake of ephedrine. At that time as a newcomer to the ‘big’ world of sport I was not only impressed by the more than 400 journalists at the press conference aggressively attacking FIFA and Mr. Blatter for suspending Maradona, but particularly on the firm and straightforward position of FIFA and Mr. Blatter, for the fight against doping. Of course such a case has an atmospheric effect on a mega event such as the FIFA World Cup, but this is not the main reason why FIFA consequently followed a strategy in the fight against doping as outlined in the recent British Journal of Sports Medicine which we have presented prior the FIFA World Cup 2006 in Germany and distributed to the participating teams, media and anybody who was interested to learn about what we are doing in the fight against doping.

What are the other reasons which have to be considered?..

It is a well-established fact that improved fitness will have a positive impact on the health status of individuals and society in general. Science has provided also evidence that regular exercise can be successfully prescribed as a therapeutic modality to tackle non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases and others. That means that we as doctors, if confronted with these kinds of diseases, might be prescribing 30 minutes of exercise four times a week instead of pills. What an impact such scientific evidence can have on the society and health care systems in different countries, I leave to your imagination.

In the short term we can say ‘Sport for Health’ or, in FIFA’s case, ‘Football for Health’.

We now have the proof that sport or football as most popular sport can be promoted as a health-enhancing leisure activity so it makes very little sense to improve the performance by artificial means such as doping. That is why we are of the opinion that in the strategy in fight against doping - education and prevention has to start not only among the top professionals but already at the grass roots in the schools, clubs and in the villages. The medical profession, in particular the physicians, are playing the key role within our organisation in this long-term educational or preventive process.

We doctors not only have the knowledge, but also the respect when we explain simple messages to football players or athletes in general, with the conclusion that there is no place for cheating or compensating for lack of skills or performance by taking prohibited substances.
We are aware that there are some doctors not acting honourably, but we also know that there are some governments, such as the one in Spain, which are trying to bring those doctors to justice. We fully support the pro-active stance of these governments.

We appreciate the fact that football is the most popular sport worldwide and the universal language of football as recently eloquently presented by the former General Secretary of the United Nations, Mr Kofi Annan, during the FIFA World Cup 2006 in Germany, can not only be used to foster the peace that is needed so much in the world, but also we see many possibilities to use this universal language and the popularity of the sport to disseminate educational messages also in the joint strategy among different sports disciplines the governmental institutions and WADA in fight against doping.

The nomination of the FIFA president as a founding member of WADA is not only highly appreciated by all of us, but also facilitates collaboration with FIFA being able to offer their logistics, infrastructure and FIFA’s worldwide network of experienced medical officers to WADA, as we are of the opinion that no commercially driven companies should be involved in the sampling procedures, or the fight against doping.

In football worldwide there are about 25,000 annual controls performed, most of them in Europe. When you look at the statistics presented by the World Anti Doping Agency FIFA is, in this respect, foremost in the amount of controls being performed in comparison to other international sport federations. Our data reporting and management system allows us to calculate the annual incidence of positive cases which for 2004 was 0.4%, 2005 - 0.3% and 2006, according to the preliminary results, remains about the same. Among the prohibited substances the most found was marihuana and cocaine and only in approximately ten cases per year anabolic steroids, which accounts for the incidence of 0.06% so we can currently conclude that there is no scientific evidence for systemic doping in football despite the existence of individual cases.

That is why we have to perform the controls on a regular basis. Since 1994 in the 32 final rounds of FIFA competitions, including four World Cups and three Olympic Games, we were confronted with only four positive cases, while during the Olympic Games in Athens, 27 positive cases of individual athletes were identified.

The question of whether there is a difference in relation to doping abuse between team and individual sports is justified and whether the strategies in prevention, education and controls should be adapted according to the underlying, maybe even fundamental problem. Or even a question could be asked, what is FIFA doing differently that they have so few doping cases despite the 25,000 controls annually?

Those questions have to be answered while looking to the future and we will discuss strategies to tackle those differences in a joint effort of international federations including the International Olympic Committee, the World Anti-Doping Agency and representatives of various governments. Each of us can contribute with their experience and knowledge to improve the situation. The World Anti-Doping Agency has the unique opportunity to harmonise and coordinate the effort in this respect and FIFA, as in the past, is willing and ready to actively support this process with the aim of promoting sport as a health-enhancing leisure activity.
With these words once again on behalf of Mr. Blatter and also on behalf of my colleagues in the FIFA Sports Medical Committee, I would like to thank you for the honourable invitation and the opportunity to share briefly our experience with the conference. I am looking forward to further collaboration with WADA as well as governments and, as from today, with UNESCO.

Prof Dr. Jiri Dvorak
FIFA Chief Medical Officer
Paris, France
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