Safeguarding Youth Sport (SYS)

www.safeguardingyouthsport.eu

EU Sport Forum 2016

The Hague
SYS: Project Lead

- International Centre Ethics in Sport (ICES)
- Ghent - Belgium
- An expert centre, recognised by the Flemish ministry of Sport, to inform, sensitize and support sport organisations in all their activities concerning ethical issues in sport

- More info: http://www.ethicsandsport.com/english
SYS: Project Partners

• 5 universities: BE, DE, DK, LT, RO
• 2 National Olympic Committees: NL, HR
• 2 umbrella organisations: ENGSO Youth, Panathlon International
• 1 expert centre: Child Protection in Sport Unit (UK)
SYS: Project Consortium
SYS: The Aims

• What
  – Build and share knowledge and expertise on integrity threats in elite youth sport, stimulating individual empowerment of athletes and promoting a conducive ethical climate, by means of:

• How
  – Collecting theoretical insights;
  – Gathering existing relevant practices;
  – Analyzing those insights and practices in terms of ‘translatability’ within a European context.
SYS: Project Work

- 4 Internal Meetings + 1 Final Conference
- 2 Literature Reviews on
  - Integrity threats in elite sport
  - Individual athlete empowerment + ethical climate in elite sport
- 12 Good Practices
- Status-quo Reports from 8 EU countries
- Focus Groups with elite athletes/coaches
- Youth Involvement
SYS: Setting the Challenge

- **Three areas** of integrity threats
  1. Threats related to organised crime:
     - match-fixing, illegal trafficking, (gene)-doping ...
  2. Violence against elite young athletes:
     - Psychological and physical violence, sexual harassment and abuse, neglect, bullying ...
  3. Related health and well-being issues
     - Body image, eating disorders, self harm ...

- SYS focused on areas 2 and 3
SYS: Setting the Challenge

- Increased risk for athletes as they progress up the sporting talent ladder
- Elite sport risk factors, among others:
  - Win-at-all-cost
  - Status confusion
  - Coach-athlete relationship
  - Self-image
“Child athletes are children first: Let them play! ”

Gella Vandecaveye, Olympic silver and bronze medallist
Examples of violence against elite young athletes:

- Overtraining as deliberate training practice ‘to toughening them up’
- Requiring young athletes to play when injured
- Use of physical exercise as a punishment
- Humiliation or bullying based on gender, body, shape, performance ...
- Undue mental pressure from too high expectations
- Requiring sex as a prerequisite for team selection or privileges
Examples of related health and well-being issues:

- Nutrition and weight loss regimes leading to eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia
- Mental health issues linked to coping with pressure from media intrusion
- Self-harm, linked to perceived poor performances (exacerbated by coach/peers)
SYS: Tackling the Challenge

- Holistic and solution-focused approach
- Three levels of policy
- Three key stakeholder groups

→ Safeguarding Pyramid
SYS: The Recommendations

• 5 target groups:
  – policy-makers
  – coaches
  – **athletes!** → empowerment
  – event and competition organisers
  – developers/providers of educational programmes
SYS: The Recommendations

• Key message = change of culture needed
• Embed required values in organisational culture and policy (codes of ethics AND conduct)
• Need for ‘ethics education’
• No-blame and positive message

Safeguarding does serve winning!
SYS: The Legacy

• **Tangible**
  – Print + digital booklet for elite sport stakeholders
  – Final conference (13 May 2015)
  – Website for stakeholders with info during *and after* the project

• **Intangible**
  – Development of a European network relationships with a focus on improving training and competition conditions in youth sport
  – Increased awareness and knowledge of the importance of empowerment and ethical climate in elite sport contexts
  – Clear mapping of future opportunities
More info

• Project website: www.safeguardingyouthsport.eu
• Our centre: http://www.ethicsandsport.com/english