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Anti-Doping in Grassroots Football

Summary Results of a European Survey

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There is a growing concern among policy makers and sport stakeholders that doping outside the elite sporting system is an expanding and problematic phenomenon. That's giving rise to the belief that the misuse of doping agents in recreational sport has become a societal problem and a public health concern. Whereas the latter is happening at high level, the same level of awareness is missing among amateur football players, thus representing a major issue if we consider the social harm and impact upon both users and sport communities doping abuse might create. It is equally important to raise awareness of the issue even where doping may not be occurring. An understanding of the issue dangers of doping is important so that a broad clean sport culture can be nurtured. The use of drugs in football is not widely associated with the sport because of lack of evidence, unlike individual sports such as cycling, weightlifting, and track and field. Much closer collaboration and further investigation is needed with regard to prohibited substances, detection methods, and data collection. This ANTI-DIF project seeks to address these various issues through a series of key actions:

1. Understand the problem/evaluate the current situation (investigation) in the European Local/grassroots football clubs.
2. Creation of value-based education materials.
3. Creation of guidelines for "anti-doping coaches" who act as ambassadors in the fight against doping.
4. Production of an Anti-Doping Code of Conduct for Amateur Grassroots Football.

This project will be among the first educational tools to meet the anti-doping education standardization criteria. The project aims to contribute to the development of these new standards (especially in respect of grassroots football). The project will provide sport-specific educational material that will be delivered to grassroots level footballers and meet the anti-doping education standardization criteria.

This Summary Report presents a synopsis of a Europe-wide study undertaken by the project Partners among grassroots players.

The ambition of the survey was to gather information about the use of and attitudes towards doping, as well as information about the way anti-doping education best could be delivered. The Survey aimed to provide the project with insight that is crucial in developing the education material.

The survey was completed by 733 respondents from Norway, Greece, Lithuania Bulgaria and the UK.

Results showed that 72% were male and 75% of the players were 21 years and younger. They spent a lot of time on grassroots football and the overwhelming majority did not earn any money on their football. They used a variety of legal substances, and almost none had taken or even considered taking illegal substances of any kind. The moral stance against doping was strong, but there was slightly more who were positive to doping when it comes to physical improvement.

Few of the players had received any anti-doping education and they were not particularly interested in getting any. If they were to receive such education, the whole club or team should be involved with online education and it should be brief. The health risks and the anti-doping regulations were the top two topics.

The material showed hardly any difference between boys/men and girls/women.

The boys/men had played longer than the girls, but they spent the same amount of time on football. More boys took part in fitness than girls. There was no significant difference in their attitudes towards anti-doping education – none were particularly interested, and they all preferred online.

The boys and the girls do more or less agree on the fact that doping is not okay. Some of the respondents have thought about using and some have used prohibited substance. So even though a big majority of the respondents haven't thought about using, it is still important to focus on the last percentages that are in the "danger zone". If the tools developed at the end of this project can help us to get them out of the "danger zone", we have prevented the use of doping for many players if you look at the big picture and not just the percentage in this survey.

One of the main findings of the survey is that the majority of grassroots players are not very interested in anti-doping education. The results confirm the notion that anti-doping is not on top of the agenda for grassroots football:

- 20% had been offered any information or education on anti-doping.
- 26% had attended any lectures or seminars on anti-doping.
- 14% were aware of any anti-doping education within their club.

The survey dug deeper into the educational process and it is interesting to note that the majority preferred the anti-doping education to be an all-team and/or all-club process. Even though most of the respondents wanted the education to be online; only 23% wanted to learn by themselves.

Overall it is therefore a major task of the project to make the subject relevant to the players.

PLEASE NOTE: The detailed comprehensive Survey Report, including literature review, can be downloaded from www.keepfootballclean.eu