

Tennis betting panel to further review 45 matches

London – An independent panel concluded Monday that 45 professional tennis matches from the past five years require further review because of suspicious betting patterns.

The International Tennis Federation, the ATP, the WTA Tour and the four Grand Slams published the findings of the panel in a 66-page report.

The review said while „professional tennis is neither institutionally nor systematically corrupt, it is potentially at a crossroads.“

The review said it had examined 73 matches over the past five years, and 45 remain under suspicion „from a betting perspective.“ It didn't say which matches were under suspicion.

„That said, we have found no evidence of any ‚Mafia‘ involvement in corrupting the integrity of tennis,“ the review said. „We do not doubt that criminal elements may be involved in seeking to subvert or corrupt some players-officials and that they may even involve organized criminal gangs.“

The review was prompted by a series of events connected to gambling in tennis. Most prominently, an online betting site, in an unprecedented move, voided all bets on a match involving Nikolay Davydenko last year because of suspicious gambling patterns. The fourth-ranked Russian withdrew against 87th-ranked Martin Vassallo Arguello in the third set of a match in Poland, citing a foot injury.

Since the Davydenko match, others have said they have been approached by outsiders trying to influence a match. Belgian player Gilles Elseneer said he was offered – and turned down –

more than USD 100,000 to lose a first-round match against Potito Starace of Italy at Wimbledon in 2005.

Five players, all Italians, have been fined or suspended for betting on tennis.

„There is sufficient cause for concern about the integrity of some players and those outside tennis who seek to corrupt them,“ the review said.

The report comes a week before the start of the year’s second Grand Slam tournament, the French Open. In February, that tournament’s organizers filed suit in a bid to ban online gambling companies from offering bets on the Grand Slam tournament, but last month a Belgian court ruled in favor of the betting companies.

Besides noting the 45 matches to be investigated further, the review panel made 15 recommendations that the sport’s four governing bodies accepted – including „any player caught cheating should be punished by a lengthy suspension for a first offense and, if the circumstances merit it, a life ban.“ They also agreed to have a uniform anti-corruption program and an integrity unit.

The report also examines the practice of „tanking,“ which it defines as „a player not giving ‚best efforts‘ in a match.“ While no specific recommendations were made, the report did „urge officials to be alert to such activity and to deal with it as a break of the rules whenever such behavior can be proved.“

Another of the recommendations allows only players and essential tournament personnel to have access to the locker rooms at tournaments. The report said many believe that insider knowledge, such as a player’s injury or illness that is not widely known, gets passed on to bettors.

„The findings of this review clearly demonstrate the need for

having an integrity unit," said Jeff Rees, one of leaders of the independent review. „The aim to rid any uncertainty or implication of corruption in tennis is fundamental to the reputation and future standing of the game and is fully supported by all international tennis bodies.“