

# Betting operators welcome sanctions against Lee

Mike O’Kane, Chairman of ESSA the integrity body for licensed betting operators, stated that his organisation “fully supports tough sanctions against any player, official or other party that engages in corrupt activity designed to manipulate sporting events to defraud bookmakers and their customers.”

Commenting following the decision to ban Stephen Lee for 12 years for match-fixing, O’Kane stated that “detailed information regarding the amounts, types of bets and the individuals placing those bets were vital elements in that decision. Licensed betting operators work closely with regulators and sporting bodies and have done much to drive corrupters away from regulated gambling markets.”

However, O’Kane advised that his organisation “remained vigilant, employing sophisticated security systems designed to detect suspicious betting. Licensed operators have a clear business need to maintain the integrity of sporting events and it is pleasing that when such corrupt activity does occur it results in effective action to punish the individuals involved.

“Unfortunately, some other sports are not as active in this area, lacking effective rules and sanctions and with poor financial records, notably safeguarding players’ wages. Such poor governance issues are allowing fixers to infiltrate certain sports and that is an issue that needs to be addressed as matter of urgency.”

He also warned against unsubstantiated and knee-jerk reactions to limit the markets offered by regulated betting operators, such as in-play betting, as a remedy to address match-fixing. O’Kane fully supports recent comments made by the British

Gambling Commission on this issue that “any threat to sports betting integrity can be managed without the need to ban what is a very popular activity.”

“As Europol and others have detailed, match-fixers bet primarily on unregulated markets which are not subject to any restrictions. Any attempt to impose market restrictions on licensed operators would have the undesirable effect of pushing consumers towards the unregulated market, which has no transparency or accountability and would be virtually impossible to monitor,” he stated.

“There is simply no evidence to support limits on regulated betting markets which would be an unjustified restriction on trade based on unsubstantiated integrity grounds. Such market limitations would put licensed operators at a clear disadvantage and be of no benefit on integrity issues.”