

Legalify Attorneys



Match-Fixing: Legal Strategies to Challenge Sanctions

Introduction

A match-fixing allegation or ban can derail an athlete's career, branding them with a stigma that threatens their livelihood and reputation. Increasingly, match-fixing claims are being pursued with urgency, often backed by betting pattern reports, statistical anomalies, and expert opinions. Yet, these tools are only as strong as the evidence they are paired with. Sometimes, the process forgets that behind the data is a human being with a life, a career, a future and a right to fairness.

In CAS 2024/A/10456 Arturs Lotcikovs v. Latvian Football Federation, decided on May 14, 2025, Latvian footballer Arturs Lotcikovs overturned a 12-month suspension and €1,000 fine imposed by the Latvian Football Federation (LFF) for alleged manipulation of a 2023 match. The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) ruling exposed the LFF's reliance on inconclusive evidence, providing a legal playbook for athletes to challenge similar sanctions.

At Legalify Attorneys one of our core practice areas is Sport Law and regulations, and we fully understand that mere allegations of match-fixing can devastate a footballer's career long before any evidence is tested, so we take these matters very seriously. Our approach is deliberate and informed, rooted in a deep understanding of both the legal framework and the realities facing today's footballers and professionals. We know that disciplinary proceedings demand more than defence, they require strategy, attention to detail, and an unflinching commitment to fairness. Below, we analyse the legal strategies that secured Lotcikovs' victory and offer actionable guidance for professionals facing match-fixing sanctions.

Fact of the Case

On 7 October 2023, FK Dinamo Riga played FK Tukums 2000/TSS 2 in a match that would soon become a subject of national controversy in Latvia. Dinamo led 3-0 at halftime but eventually lost 3-4. This shocking reversal drew the attention of UEFA's Betting Fraud Detection System (BFDS), which flagged suspicious betting patterns that pointed toward possible match manipulation. The BFDS particularly report flagged suspicious betting patterns, with 97% of €35,815 in wagers betting on a draw after the 52nd-minute goal. Bet365's suspension of live betting markets in the 78th minute heightened concerns. A Starlizard report noted pricing irregularities, and five LFF-appointed experts, three affiliated, two independent, opined on player actions. The report specifically noted that 97% of the betting turnover was for the match to end in a draw. This highly unusual concentration of bets, coupled with passive defending by some Dinamo players, raised alarms. Bookmakers like Bet365 even removed live betting options midway through the second half, an extremely rare occurrence unless serious concerns arise.

Following this, the Latvian Football Federation (LFF) launched an investigation and commissioned a panel of five experts. They concluded that several Dinamo Riga players, including Arturs Lotcikovs, were involved in deliberate match-fixing. On December 19, 2023, the LFF Ethics Committee found the match manipulated, sanctioning Lotcikovs under Article 10.1.3.2 of its Disciplinary Regulations for a penalty-causing foul and passive defending. The LFF Appeals Committee upheld the decision on February 12, 2024. Lotcikovs appealed to CAS, arguing insufficient evidence and procedural flaws

CAS Final Decision

The CAS ruling highlights key legal strategies for athletes to contest match-fixing bans, rooted in CAS jurisprudence and procedural rigor. What stands out in the decision is the standard of proof. CAS reiterated that it's not enough for a match to be suspicious. If a specific player is to be sanctioned, the evidence must clearly show their individual role in manipulating the match.

CAS adopted the “comfortable satisfaction” standard higher than mere suspicion, but lower than criminal “beyond reasonable doubt.” Even by that measure, the panel ruled that the LFF’s evidence was not convincing enough to punish Lotcikovs.

Several Crucial Flaws Stood Out

Lack of Direct Evidence: None of the integrity reports (UEFA’s BFDS, the Starlizard Report, or the United Lotteries report) made any direct reference to Lotcikovs’ actions.

Questionable Expert Testimony: Though expert opinions were submitted, CAS noted that many of them lacked specifics. For instance, Expert 2 only referred vaguely to two instances involving Lotcikovs—one of which wasn’t even described. Other experts lumped Lotcikovs together with other players without analysing his actions independently

Weak Video Analysis: CAS reviewed the match footage and found that while Lotcikovs could have performed better at times, his actions were not unusual or egregiously passive enough to prove foul play. Mistakes alone, the panel emphasized, are not evidence of intent to cheat.

Procedural Red Flags: The player was not granted full access to some of the materials used against him, and he wasn’t given a proper hearing at the LFF Appeal Committee level—both of which were deemed cured through the CAS de novo process, but were nonetheless noted.

How to Challenge a Match-Fixing Ban

Step-by-Step Strategy



DEMAND SPECIFIC PROOF OF INDIVIDUAL INVOLVEMENT

Force the federation to point to your *specific* actions, not general suspicion.



CHALLENGE THE RELIABILITY OF EXPERT TESTIMONY

Check the credentials and independence of any so-called expert analysis.



USE VIDEO FOOTAGE TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

Conduct a minute-by-minute analysis showing normal play—not foul intent.



SCRUTINIZE THE EXPERTS' CREDIBILITY

Check the credentials and independence of any so-called expert analysis.



CHALLENGE THE PROCEDURE ITSELF

Were you given a fair hearing? Were all documents shared? Procedural fairness matters.



FRAME ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

Frame poor performance around fatigue, tactics, or inexperience



BFDS SYSTEM ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH

Insist on other, stronger evidence of match manipulation

Strategies for Challenging Sanctions

The CAS ruling, authored by Sole Arbitrator Jordi López Batet, highlights key legal strategies for athletes to contest match-fixing bans, rooted in CAS jurisprudence and procedural rigour.

1. Demand Specific Proof of Individual Involvement:

CAS precedent (CAS 2018/A/6075, CAS 2021/A/8453) requires federations to prove both match manipulation and a player's specific role to a "comfortable satisfaction" standard, higher than a civil balance of probabilities but below criminal certainty. The LFF established manipulation through BFDS and Starlizard reports but failed to link Lotcikovs' actions to the scheme. The reports did not name him, focusing on general betting anomalies. Athletes must insist that federations pinpoint deliberate misconduct, not mere participation in a suspicious match. This strategy shifts the burden back to the accuser, exposing evidentiary gaps.

2. Challenge the Reliability of Expert Testimony:

The LFF's case relied on five expert opinions, but their weaknesses were fatal:

- a. Experts 4 and 5: Vague claims of "unsportsmanlike" conduct lacked specific references to Lotcikovs' actions, rendering them legally deficient.
- b. Expert 2: Cited a 50th-minute foul but did not consistently flag Lotcikovs' performance as problematic.
- c. Experts 1 and 3: Noted passive defending (e.g., at 46:30, 78:56), but match footage showed routine errors, not intentional sabotage.

Applying CAS 2017/A/5338, the arbitrator held that performance must be "strikingly poor or passive beyond measure" to infer match-fixing intent. Lotcikovs' errors fell short. Athletes should challenge expert testimony for lack of specificity, independence (three LFF-affiliated

experts raised bias concerns), or failure to align with video evidence. Requesting raw data or methodologies behind opinions can further undermine their credibility.

3. Use Video Footage to your advantage as Your Shield.

Commission an independent performance analyst to break down the match minute-by-minute. Compare the player's performance to their average metrics. Show that the movements, decisions, and involvement were consistent with normal game dynamics, not part of a match-fixing scheme.

Experts often give opinions after reviewing match footage. They may say a defender was "passive," or "didn't chase down the ball." But sports is unpredictable, and what may look passive on tape could be fatigue, poor judgment, or bad tactics, not match-fixing.

In Lotcikovs' case, CAS carefully reviewed the match footage and disagreed with the federation's experts. The player's performance may have been underwhelming, but not criminally suspicious. Mistakes do not automatically mean manipulation.

4. Scrutinize the Experts' Credibility

Request the CVs, roles, affiliations, and independence declarations of all experts involved in the investigation. If they are too close to the federation or lack match analysis credentials, challenge their opinions and ask for neutral third-party reviewers.

A recurring problem in disciplinary hearings is that the so-called "independent experts" are not actually independent. They are often federation staff or affiliated individuals. In the Lotcikovs case, three of the five "independent experts" were employees of the Latvian Football Federation. Although CAS noted that there was no proven evidence that undermines their objectivity or expertise.

5. Challenge the Procedure Itself

It's not just about the evidence, it's about the process. If the federation failed to give the accused a fair hearing, didn't disclose documents, or conducted internal reviews without transparency, that's grounds for challenge. It should be noted that Article R51 CAS code allows cases to be heard afresh granting the parties every opportunity not only to submit written briefs and any kind of evidence, but also to be extensively heard and to examine and cross-examine witnesses or experts during a hearing; which can effectively cure allegations of wrong procedures and unfair hearing at the lower tribunal. In other words, the Panel acts as if it were considering the question for the first time, affording no deference to the decisions below.

6. Frame Alternative Explanations

Build a timeline of events, contracts, match history, and even psychological assessments to show that poor performance was coincidental or tactical, and does not prove guilt.

In sports law, the absence of motive or benefit can be a powerful defense. If a player wasn't paid, had no suspicious bank transactions, and did not bet on the match, those are major factors in their favour.

In Lotcikovs' case, the LFF argued he received cash payments, which violated ethical rules. But CAS noted that there was no evidence linking these payments to match-fixing or any misconduct during the game in question

7. BFDS system alone is not enough


In order to come to the conclusion that a match is fixed, the analytical information needs to be supported by other, different and external elements pointing in the same direction, i.e. a differentiation must be

made between the so-called quantitative information and a qualitative analysis of the quantitative information, which is also needed. Although, the BFDS system could be improved through an ad hoc UEFA regulation, the analytical information derived from it is valuable evidence that, particularly if corroborated by further evidence, can be used in order to conclude that a club was directly or indirectly involved in match-fixing.

Conclusion

Allegations of match-fixing strike at the very foundation of a player's career. But accusation is not conviction, and suspicion is not proof. The process must be held to a standard that respects the seriousness of the claim and the dignity of the person accused. What the case of Arturs Lotcikovs demonstrates is that: when evidence is misread, or procedures are overlooked, then laws will be misapplied and justice may fail. But with a clear strategy, a firm grasp of the rules, and the right legal guidance, it is possible to defend what matters most, reputation, livelihood, and future.

Disclaimer

This article is for general information purposes only and does not constitute legal advice or professional guidance in relation to match-fixing, disciplinary proceedings, or any related matter. Legalify Attorneys is available to provide tailored assistance or clarification should you require guidance on how the issues discussed (or any legal issue) may apply to you or your organisation. All enquiries may be directed to your usual contact at the firm, or to:  info@legalifyattorneys.com.ng

Legalify Attorneys

For more information contact :
info@legalifyattorneys.com
contact@legalifyattorneys.com

