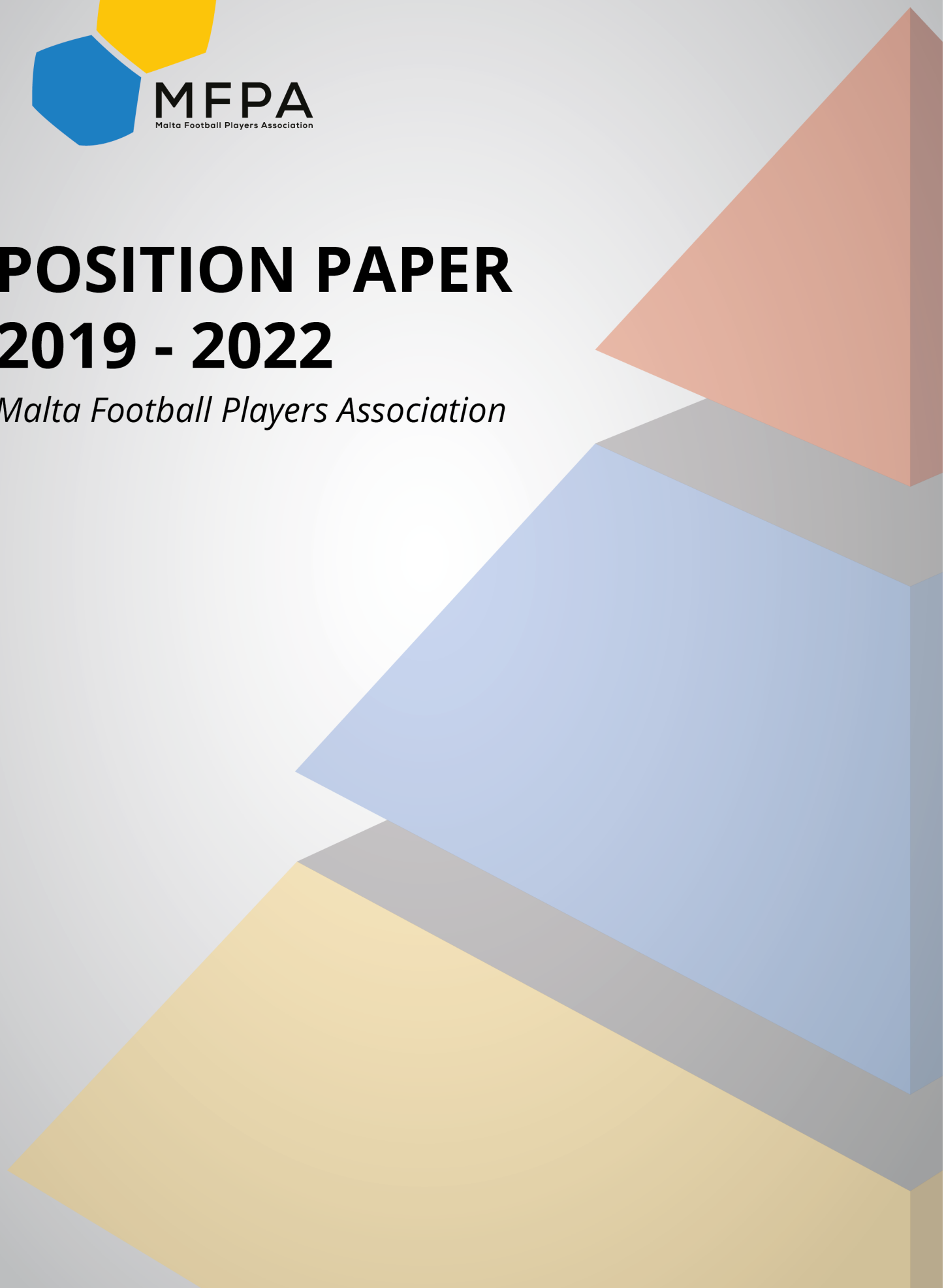




POSITION PAPER

2019 - 2022

Malta Football Players Association



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INTRODUCTION

The founding players that drove the inception of the Malta Football Players Association, envisaged an organisation at the forefront of player advocacy, addressing the various challenges faced by football players in Malta. Laying down strong foundations, they established a professional, democratic set-up and became full FIFPro members in three short years.

In 2014, the first 4-year position paper was launched, setting out ambitious objectives for the young Association's first years. Multiple projects, services and initiatives were rolled out. Slowly but surely, MFPA became synonymous with thorough, well researched work, giving rise to the Association's standing, as a major stakeholder in Maltese Football. Most of the objectives set out in the first position paper have been achieved, but the work is far from done.

What propels this second 4-year position paper, is our sense of urgency for better conditions and improved opportunities for players in Malta. MFPA's strategy, sets out to strengthen our advocacy arm, whilst expanding the services offered to member players. It also prioritizes internal standard processes, to ensure transparency, good governance and efficiency in all levels of the organisation

The 5 pillared structure in this position paper, not only sets out clear objectives for MFPA, but also identifies the ways in which these can be achieved.

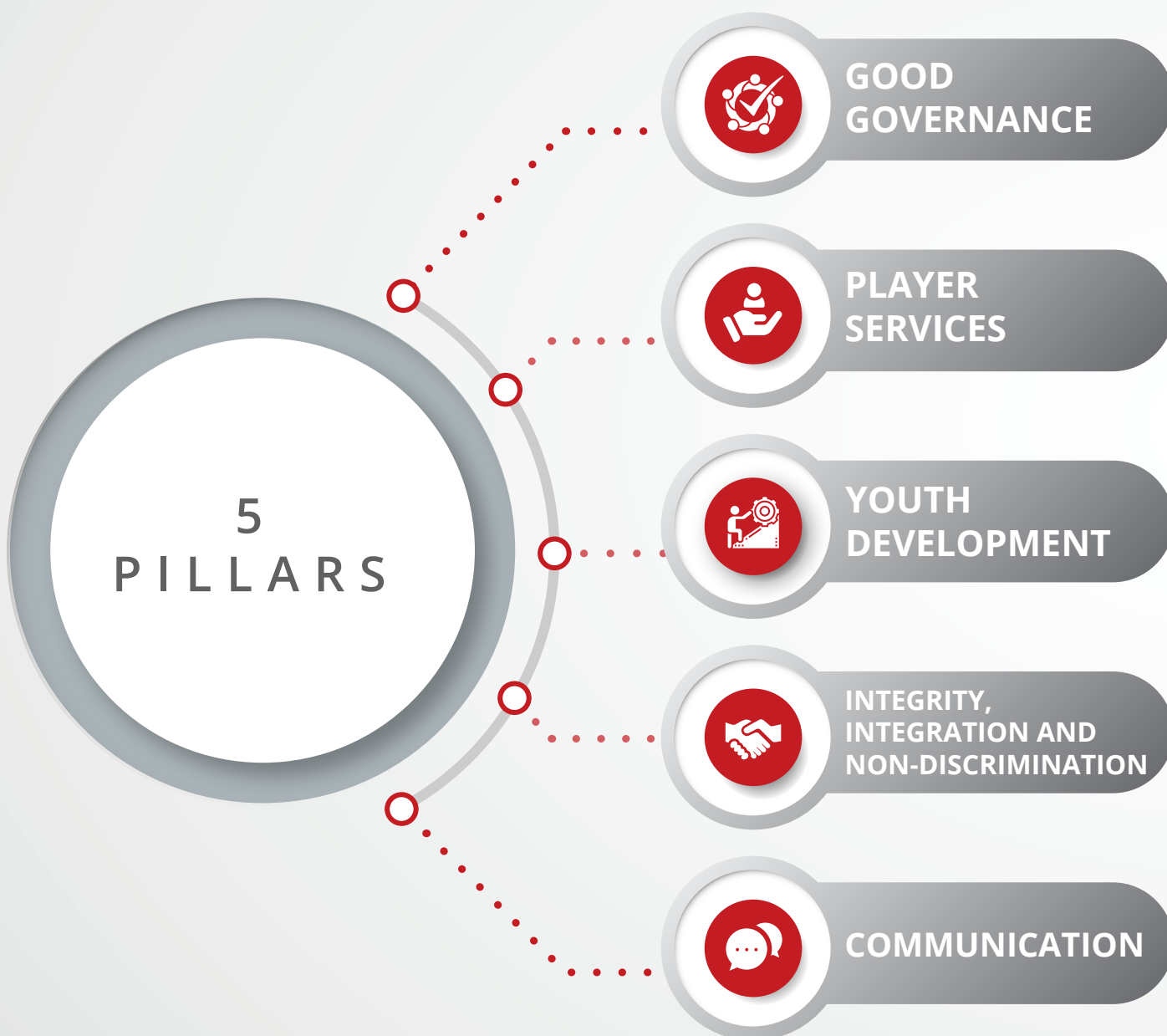
The inspiration that brought about MFPA's inception, that drove all our past achievements, and that continues to propel us forward today, is our deep love for football, and the wisdom to know that players are the beating heart of the beautiful game.



MFPA Team with FIFPro Legal Director Roy Vermeer
Photo by Domenic Aquilina

PILLARS

The following 5 pillars embody the strategy of MFPA for the coming 4 years:



1. GOOD GOVERNANCE

It is important that an organisation continuously reviews and improves, the principles of good governance for them to be genuine and effective.

MFPA is a Players Association run by players for players, which seeks to represent and protect the collective rights of players in Malta. Since its inception, it has prided itself on being founded on principles of Good Governance and then kept on updating itself via statutory and regulatory changes over the course of time.

For the next 4 years, MFPA's mission is to continue relentlessly pursuing even better structures and systems in fulfilment of Good Governance.

1.1 Transparency and Accountability

To promote transparency and accountability MFPA shall seek to implement the following measures:

- Set up an all-encompassing and comprehensive communication strategy by which members and stakeholders are informed about the work, projects and progress of MFPA's agenda.
- Set up for itself, its executive members and its officials, clear roles and responsibilities, complete with allocated timeframes for projects and tasks.
- Set up clear systems for checks and balances both for financial as well as for administrative operations. MFPA remains committed to draw up annual audits and have same audited yearly by an independent professional.
- Ensure that a proper evaluation process, complete with discussion and suggestions for future improvement is made at executive level, after every major project.
- Financial information shall remain available for review by the members during the AGM and the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations as well as FIFPro.
- Undertake a consultation process with stakeholders, the feedback of which will guide the executive board to set the vision, purpose and strategy of the Association.
- Set up within MFPA, a Council of active players from different clubs, divisions and gender, with the aim of being closer to member players and creating better communication channels.
- Ensure a high standard code of ethics for MFPA Executive, Council and Officials, as well as procedures for dealing with conflict of interest.
- Improve current systems for accountability in all operations, projects and tasks. Open its doors to members and stakeholders for discussion.
- Set up an effective transparency strategy including by making itself open for frank and transparent discussion with its members, about the Association's operations.
- Ensure a Privacy Policy in line with GDPR.
- MFPA shall evaluate the viability of establishing fixed terms and/or age limits for presidents and board members, to ensure balance of power.

1.2 Autonomous but Collaborative

MFPA is completely autonomous from the Malta Football Association, both financially as well as administratively. This autonomy is crucial because it allows MFPA to focus solely on protecting the rights of football players in Malta without fear of potential conflict of interest.

The Maltese Players' Association remains absolutely committed to the autonomous nature of its structure. However, its autonomous nature, will not preclude it from collaborating with interested parties, stakeholders and authorities for the sake of its mission to protect the rights of players in Malta.

1.3 Financial Independence

In the coming four years, MFPA Executive shall be tasked with the setting up of a comprehensive plan to strengthen the financial aspect of the Association, improve financial mobility and to find ways to continue investing in the Association itself.

1.4 Full Compliance

FIFPro

MFPA is a proud and full member of FIFPro. In light of this, it commits itself to continue working tirelessly to ensure full compliance to FIFPro rules, policies and guidelines. In view of this, MFPA will also remain a very active member, participating in FIFPro projects and ensuring MFPA executive, officials and members remain in the loop.

MFPA commits to open negotiations, discussions and collaborations with organisations, with the aim to improve the conditions of players in Malta.

MFPA believes it is always preferable to come to a mutually beneficial solution via discussion, and will thus seek out collaborations as a first step. However, it will seek out other routes, should collaborations and negotiations fail to provide an acceptable solution for the benefit of players.

The ultimate aim of the financial strategy will be to make the Association even more self sustainable without the need for external financial support.

Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations

The Maltese players' Association is registered as a Voluntary Organisation in terms of the Laws of Malta. Consequently, it is fully committed to being fully compliant to the legal requirements demanded of it in pursuance of said registration.

MFPA shall also be an active participant in projects hosted by the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations.

1.4 Full Compliance *(continued)*

Laws of Malta and EU

MFPA shall remain fully compliant with the applicable Laws of Malta and EU namely:

- Employment Laws,
- Anti Discrimination Laws,
- Privacy Laws,
- Registration Laws.



2. PLAYER SERVICES

Throughout the years, MFPA has been working tirelessly to address problematic issues, to drive change and to improve players' conditions. This is not limited to helping the player only in his capacity as a player, but also helping the player as a human being, both during as well as after his football career.

MFPA's purview continues to grow with the aim of offering more services to players and assisting their needs.

2.1 MFPA as a lobbying arm

MFPA was founded, not only to protect players in Malta under current regulations, but also to drive change and better the current systems in place.

It has already successfully driven change in the past and will continue to improve. MFPA remains committed to its values and to pursue:

- The complete abolishment of Parameters in Malta,
- An update to the current nursery compensation system,
- Improvement to the minimum requirements on the standard contract,
- Higher medical standards in professional football.

2.2 Legal Services

Sports Regulations are notoriously complicated and difficult to navigate through without expert advice. For this reason, MFPA will continue to offer Legal advice and consultation to all its members as part of the membership package, via agreements with legal professionals.

MFPA strategy is directed at continuing the social dialogue with a firm eye on our objectives and a firm hand if needed to support our cause and achieve our targets in so doing. MFPA representatives will continue to occupy positions within the MFA social dialogue, and other national fora, championing player rights.

Internationally, as FIFPro Member, MFPA representatives will also continue to actively participate in social dialogues and discussion with international football stakeholders such as UEFA, FIFA, European Clubs Association and so on.

MFPA will also continue to offer representation to all its members at a fee. Said fee shall be kept as low as possible whilst allowing the Association's legal department to cover its costs. Fees shall be transparent and agreed upon up front.

2.3 A collective bargaining agreement

The Maltese Player's Association enjoys the benefit of having access to the World's foremost football experts and legal minds. After extensive research, and discussion with our international partners, MFPA has come to the conclusion that a more permanent solution can be found via a Collective Bargaining Agreement.

For this reason, in the next four years, MFPA will work to draft, consult, agree on and implement a Collective Bargaining Agreement. Said agreement will seek to improve current conditions, whilst being tailor made for the needs of Maltese football.

2.4 Taxation advice and assistance

MFPA shall be launching a new service by which Players can turn to the association to seek advice about applicable taxation issues. MFPA will not seek to provide tax advice but shall assist players by consulting with approved intermediaries.

2.5 Education

MFPA shall remain committed to its advocacy for Education.

The 'Life After Football' campaign in favour of dual career paths will continue throughout the next four years. Currently MFPA has been offering the following Educational opportunities:

- Sports Management degree with the University of Northern Denmark,
- MFPA Life After Football Scholarship,
- Assistance with regards to lecture schedule for students at MCAST and ITS.

The idea behind this, is that it will resolve a lot of the legal anomalies currently in place as well as rectify situations which are non-compliant to international football rules, human rights and employment laws.

MFPA will, upon the player's request, investigate with the relevant authorities as to whether tax and social security are being paid by the club for the player's services.

Apart from academic educational projects, MFPA plans to hold various short courses aimed at helping players in their everyday life. Such educational sessions can include:

- Information sessions about the dangers of doping,
- Financial planning,
- First Aid courses and sessions,
- Regulatory information sessions.

New projects will be explored, with the scope of ever increasing opportunities for players in Malta.

2.6 Health

Health, for an athlete should not be limited to treatment given following injuries. It is a multi-faceted issue which is deserving of a comprehensive and thorough analysis. MFPA will aim to undertake a number of initiatives during the term in the following areas:

- i.* Quality of turf evaluation
- ii.* Anti-Doping campaigns
- iii.* Comprehensive medical examination as a precaution
- iv.* Health and Safety during training and matches
- v.* Medical expenses coverage
- vi.* Mental Health
- vii.* Proper nutrition

i. Quality of turf evaluation

The Players Association shall commit to evaluating the turf in Maltese football pitches vis-à-vis its quality and impact on injury risks. Based on empiric data, the Players' Association shall campaign, advocate and pressure for quality turf in Maltese pitches.

iii. Comprehensive medical examination as a precaution

Whilst in Malta the idea of holding rigorous medical tests before the start of a season is still barely in its inception, medical professionals have reiterated the importance of such tests, which would prove to be life saving.

ii. Anti-Doping campaigns

Doping is not only illicit, but also extremely dangerous to players' health. As part of MFPA's anti-doping campaign entitled 'Live, Train and Compete Clean – Say not to Doping', Players will be educated about the life threatening dangers one exposes himself when consuming prohibited substances.

Medical tests would be able to gage life threatening cardiac issues which could prove fatal for someone playing competitive sports. During the next four years MFPA will work on a plan to start instilling this mentality in local football with the ultimate aim of making such medical tests a standard instead of a rarity.

2.6 Health (continued)

iv. Health and Safety during training and matches

Health and Safety measures must be ascertained in competitive football. MFPA has in the past publicly demanded better medical standards from the Maltese Association and has since been monitoring the progress being made. Medical rooms with up to date equipment have been promised and are currently underway.

MFPA has also in parallel to this, been working to disseminate First Aid information to players and club officials. Member players have been able to attend full First Aid courses free of charge for over 3 years. Moreover, MFPA has been visiting clubs and giving short first aid sessions to players and club officials. It has also been distributing vouchers which can be used by clubs to buy medical equipment. These initiatives will remain in place for the foreseeable future.

v. Medical expenses coverage

Unfortunately injuries are a reality in football. Players must prepare themselves for this eventuality.

Professional players currently enjoy some sort of coverage because contractually clubs are responsible for the treatment and cost of injuries which take place whilst the player is giving a service to the club or his national team. However, amateur players are completely unprotected in this regard.

To try to mitigate this problem, MFPA has managed to come to an agreement with an insurance broker to provide for a Sports Medical insurance at a reasonable price. This is available to MFPA member player.

Clubs, are able to benefit from a discounted price if they insure a number of member players at one go. In the long term it is cheaper for a club to insure all players rather than pay for treatment of injured players, out of pocket throughout the season.

For the coming years, MFPA will seek to ensure that an affordable Sports Medical Insurance remains available and to try to educate individual players and clubs about the importance of coverage.

vi. Mental health

Mental health is often forgotten in the hectic world of sports. Athletes are human and can suffer from the same ailments the general public suffers, including mental illnesses and anxieties. Moreover, players face public scrutiny and high stress levels due to competition.

MFPA will seek to actively work to fight the stigma that often revolves around mental health and to continuously educate its members about the importance of mental health and how one can get help.

2.6 Health (continued)

vii. Proper nutrition

MFPA believes there is currently still not enough education about how impactful proper nutrition can be for a player's performance. The intake of calories and of particular types of food must be appropriate for the stress and activity one puts on the body.

MFPA will seek to actively promote healthy and appropriate nutrition for football players, via campaigns and education.



Jean-Marc Bosman - MFPA Awards 2016
Photo by Domenic Aquilina

3. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

MFPA believes in being proactive rather than being reactive. Expecting growth from youth programme, when the type of player development available is mediocre is illogical. To improve the quality of football players in Malta, it is obvious that a bigger investment in youth development must be taken and a long-term strategy must be put in place.

3.1 Research based youth development strategy

MFPA believes that change should be based on more than individual agendas or opinions, but should be founded on solid research and empirical data. For this reason, MFPA will commit itself to commissioning research aimed at maximising youth development in Malta. Based on expert advice and research, it will then set up its own youth development position, for the collective good of present and future players.

Backed by research, MFPA will set, communicate and push for the changes necessary to improve youth development in Malta. The Players' Association shall reach out to Governmental bodies and the Malta Football Association to create, and implement a common comprehensive strategy, which is imperative to ensure an improvement in the middle and long term local football scene.

3.2 Guiding and educating

MFPA will remain available to member youth players (and their families) navigating through complicated regulatory systems namely by:

- Giving regulatory guidance on international transfers for minors,
- Assisting in the drafting of new employment contracts,
- Clarifying the systems in place for training compensation,
- Providing various educational opportunities and assisting in lecture schedules.



3.3 Exposing youth to professional football

MFPA believes that exposing young players to professional football gives them a better idea of the reality of a professional athletes life and sacrifices. It also has the added benefit of providing tangible goals they need to strive towards. In view of this, MFPA shall aim to provide opportunities for youth football players to be exposed and experience professional football.

MFPA shall not only push for theoretical opportunities for young players, but shall strive to provide direct opportunities itself, namely by;

- establishing networks with international professional academies,
- organising training camps outside Maltese shores,
- organising friendly matches with international academies,
- providing opportunities where youth players can showcase their talent to scouting agents.



MFPA UK Training Camp in collaboration with the Malta National Sports School

4. INTEGRITY, INTEGRATION AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Football is the world's most beautiful game because it reaches every corner of the world and touches the lives of millions. Individuals of different; economical means, race, colour, creed, sexual orientation, and gender, are passionate about it. This gives football the power to unify people, in a time were dissonance and discord are rampant.

Unfortunately, the worldwide interest that it garners, also exposes it to external threats from individuals who seek to exploit the game for personal interests, whilst threatening the very integrity of the game.

This is true everywhere, including Malta. MFPA holds dearly the values of sports integrity, integration and non-discrimination in football, and is thus making these issues a priority for the upcoming four years.

4.1 Say No to Match Fixing

MFPA will remain committed to actively work against the manipulation of matches and the involvement of players thereof.

The Maltese Players Association recognises education as an important factor in the fight against match fixing, and thus commits itself to continue throughout the next four years campaigning against match manipulation.

MFPA also recognises that education on its own will not solve this complex and multifaceted threat. Following consultation with member players, it has become evident that players are hesitant to report if they are approached because of a real fear of retribution. MFPA plans on collaborating with other stakeholders to provide for an adequate reporting mechanism that would also protect players from reprisal.

4.2 Live, Train, Compete Clean. Say No to Doping

It has come to MFPA's attention that there is a lot of misinformation surrounding anti-doping regulations. For this reason, it has embarked on a comprehensive educational campaign. Various clubs have been visited by MFPA officials and leading sports medical experts, to disseminate information to the players about anti-doping regulations, health risks and contamination issues.

In parallel to this, MFPA has set up an online platform by which players can submit photos of the substance they are thinking of ingesting and be able to get individual feedback about risks of contamination by a Medical expert.

In the coming years. MFPA will continue its educational campaign currently underway with the senior teams, whilst also seeking to widen its outreach and disseminating said information to minors and youths.

4.3 Women in Football

MFPA closed 2018 with 780 members, 777 of which were men and only 3 were women. The low number of female members is disappointing.

MFPA is aware that it must seek to connect and reach out to more women in football, who might not know of the benefits of joining, or who might not have even heard of MFPA. In the past, MFPA has tried to reach out to leading female players in Malta inviting them to take up an executive and representative role in MFPA, but the right candidate was never found. Not having a representative that is close to the needs of the female players, makes it harder to reach the players themselves.

In the next four years, MFPA shall endeavour to devise an outreach plan that will enable the players association to connect to women in Maltese football and to increase the number of female member players.

Moreover, while conditions for men in Maltese football are less than desirable, those for women are even more appalling. MFPA believes, women should have the same opportunities and resources to improve, excel and turn pro. In view of this MFPA shall actively start working towards bridging this discriminatory gap. This will be done not only by addressing current discriminatory rules, but also by ensuring there is investment substantial in women's football.

4.4 Show Racism the Red Card

There is absolutely no room for racism in society and football. MFPA is proud to represent players in Malta of all races, colours and creeds.

In view of this, it commits itself to actively fight against any forms of racial discrimination. It will not limit itself to issuing public statements against racism only, but will also offer support, and resources to victims of racism in football.

It is intolerable that players are treated as second class citizens, and taken advantage of just because of how they look or where they come from.

4.5 No room for homophobia in football

There is currently no openly gay professional player in Europe. Professional players find it difficult to come out because they feel uncertain as to whether other team mates or supporters will accept them if they do.

MFPA believes football belongs to everyone, this includes people of all types of sexual orientation. In the next 4 years it will be actively campaigning for more inclusion and acceptance, whilst battling homophobia in football and sports in general.

4.6 Frame Football - Malta

MFPA has been working closely and sponsoring Frame Football Malta. Frame Football is an inclusive adapted sport, designed and developed for people who use walking equipment such as a frame or walker. The game was developed following feedback from coaches, equipment specialists, physiotherapists, parents and the players themselves, to create a player centred football opportunity. Frame Football Malta currently operates on a completely voluntary bases.

MFPA renews its commitment to continue to support such an amazing cause. After all, football should be for everyone and “The only frame that should stop one from scoring is a goal frame”.



MFPA Say No to Match-Fixing Campaign during matches from the MFPA Training Camp

5. COMMUNICATION

Effective communication is not only crucial because it provides for more transparency and accountability in the association's governance, but also, because without it, players in Malta may never know what kind of services they can make use of and what protection is afforded to them. The very aim of MFPA is to help players, but if players are not aware of MFPA's work, they may never be helped.

5.1 Strengthening current modes of communication

MFPA is currently active on the most popular Social Media Platforms, i.e Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Each platform has its own unique audience. Using all in parallel maximises the Association's outreach.

Traditional modes of communication are also regularly utilised, this includes:

- Publishing press releases on traditional news media outlets,
- Sending out emails to members,
- Sending out text messages to members.
- Publishing MFPA's own Playerzone magazine and sending it out to members,
- Sending out communication via mail,
- Sending out surveys and feedback forms,
- Contacting members by phone.

In the coming years MFPA shall seek to analyse which modes of communication have been most effective and design a tailor made communication plan based on said research. This aims at ensuring a more effective and efficient communication strategy.

5.2 Adding new modes of communication

During the upcoming 4 years, MFPA shall explore and venture out into new and innovative modes of communication, with the ultimate aim of ensuring its message is being received and understood by all stakeholders, especially by its own members.

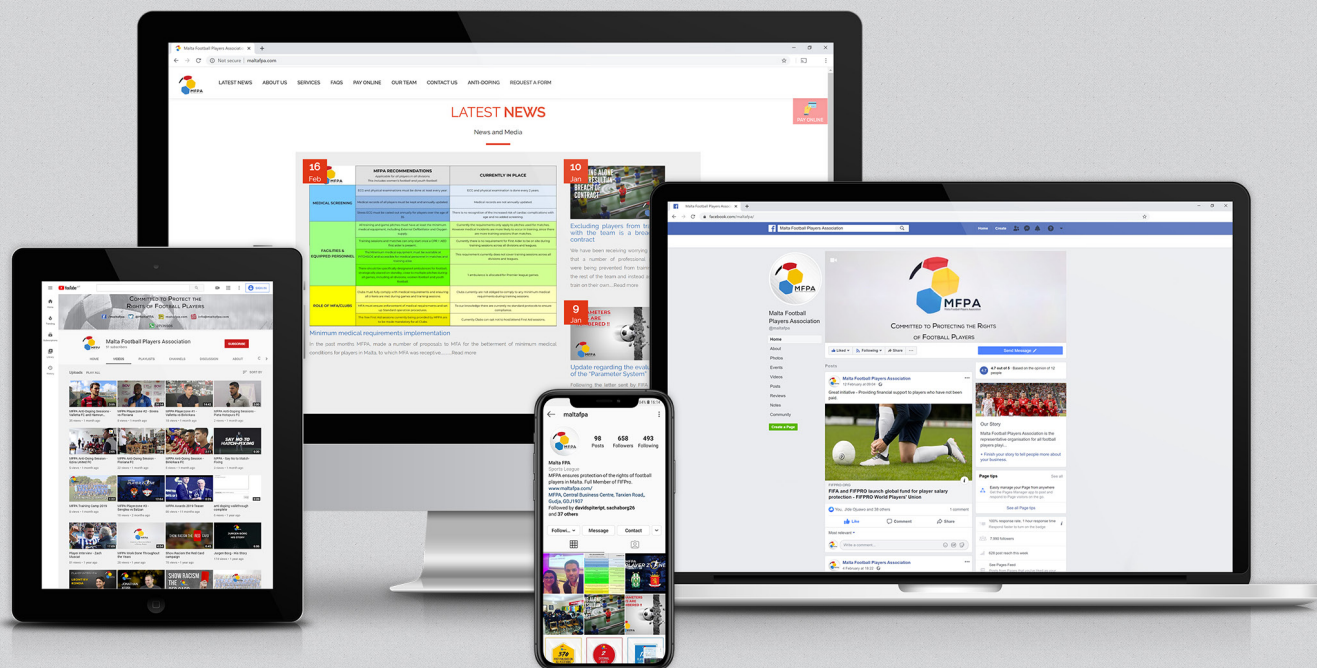
In view of this, MFPA plans to set up its own You Tube channel, to produce and share its own broadcasts. This can be used to share MFPA's progress reports, as well as a way to educate and raise awareness on various relevant issues.

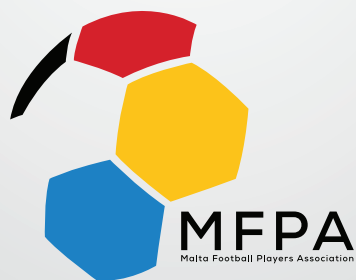
5.3 Achieving more interactivity

The Players Association has noted that currently communication is largely one way based. MFPA disseminates information to members regularly, but very few communication is ever received back.

Because MFPA wants to be close to its members, it believes that communication should be submitted but also received. In view of this, during the upcoming years MFPA shall endeavour to analyse the reasons why so little feedback is currently being received, and to strategize a plan to increase Association – Player communication.

MFPA Social Media Pages





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