

## ***Cheating the Spread: Gamblers, Point Shavers, and Game Fixers in College Football and Basketball.***

By Albert J. Figone. University of Illinois Press, Urbana, IL: 2012. Paper: (ISBN: 978-0-252-07875-0) 196 pp. \$21.95.

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In *Cheating the Spread: Gamblers, Point Shavers, and Game Fixers in College Football and Basketball*, Albert Figone masterfully chronicles the history of gambling in collegiate athletics, from the early 20th century to today. He utilizes court records, news artifacts, and interviews to chronicle the major gambling episodes—occurrences that have stained collegiate sport, undermined the credibility of institutions of higher education, and damaged the credibility and authority of intercollegiate sport administrators.

Figone begins his examination into the relationship between gamblers and college sports by highlighting the ways in which point spreads were created to foster an ideal climate for betting on sports. Parenthetically, this climate, which took hold in the 1940s, also gave rise to the conditions where athletes could be persuaded by gamblers to shave points, dump games, or both, to ensure placed bets were won. By failing to address the influence of gamblers on games—either by turning a blind eye, or failing to notice—coaches and administrators failed to address the problem when it was most able to be corrected.

The author next examines what he terms “The Golden Age of Gambling” when he describes the prominent gambling fixes of the late 1940s. By reviewing these scandals, he lays the foundation for the environment in which the college basketball scandal of 1951 emerged. Through the presentation of scores, first-hand accounts, and court documents, the author offers clear evidence showcasing how money changed hands between professional gamblers and athletes. These exchanges impacted a number of institutions, such as Long Island University and City College of New York, and players, such as Sherman White. While the tarnish on the college programs was temporary, the long-term effect on the athletes was devastating. Athletes who were identified in gambling scandals were often barred from playing professional sports and their short-term gains paled in comparison to the long-term revenue that was forfeited.

The role of coach involvement in scandals is revealed in various forms throughout the book. Figone shares the relationship legendary coaches had with players and often inquires as to why coaches failed to report players who were suspected

of taking payments from professional gamblers. In some cases, coaches like Clair Bee acknowledged their role in providing the environment where games could be fixed, while others, like Adolph Rupp, failed to accept responsibility for running corrupt programs.

Illegal gambling scandals were not relegated to the hard courts on college campuses. In chapter 5, the author highlights that, as early as the 1930s and 1940s, football players received payments during the recruitment process. Perhaps most interesting in this read was the allegations of sharing insider information by Georgia's Wally Butts and Alabama's Bear Bryant in 1962 to fix the outcome of that year's contest between those two schools—a game Alabama won 35-0. Although courts would clear the coaches of wrong-doing, the scandal and its wide-spread reporting by print media cast a dark pall on college football and provided some evidence to gambling's impact on the sport.

Other scandals that are highlighted in the book include the 1961 basketball fixes which included over thirty players from twenty-two colleges. Many of which were masterminded by gambler Jack Molinas. Figone discusses the involvement of gangsters and crime families, such as James Burke and Henry Hill, and their involvement with the 1978 Boston College scandal. These scandals also demonstrate the failure of the NCAA in mitigating gambling's impact on players and its failure to address the professionalization of high-profile college sports.

The theme of failed oversight continues into the modern environment of college sports, as indicated by recent scandals at Northwestern, Florida State, and Toledo. The author concludes that because gambling is legal in so many states, it serves to perpetuate the cycle and make cheating and gambling all the more pervasive. The end result is a damaging cycle where unscrupulous profiteers can continue to prey upon vulnerable and naive athletes seeking to make a fast buck. The win at all cost mentality associated with the escalating budgets of major programs, coupled with the political instability of the NCAA, continues to enrich the environment where fixing games continues to be the next scandal on the horizon for college sports.