

Gambling and College Basketball: The Scandal of 1951

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I

As public attention after World War II turned to the problems of economic restoration, communism, and the cold war, the appeal of big-time college basketball increased. The sport had become a very profitable business as colleges produced winning teams, coaches turned out products and many colleges became known as athletic factories. But, the sport was peculiarly blind to the disproportionate amount of gambling already associated with it. In 1944, "Phog" Allen, the legendary University of Kansas coach, warned of coming scandal "that would stink to high heaven."¹ Allen's statement was based on a report that Utah's coach had been asked how much it would cost to have his team lose the NCAA championship game with Dartmouth in March, 1944. While this isolated bribery incident aroused flurries of indignation, it was not viewed by college authorities and social critics as a symptom of a general pandemic condition in college basketball. There were, however, specific circumstances which argued differently. Bookies, the police and newspaper writers had for years been routinely alerted that certain games and matches had been fixed. This paper will examine the 1951 gambling scandal to demonstrate the way college basketball had been transformed into one of the most corrupt sports in America. Such an analysis will reveal that the nature of basketball combined with the building of corrupt programs allowed the manipulation of players by gamblers. The quest for profits had caused college administrators, coaches and the NCAA to develop a purblind attitude toward the problem of gambling in college basketball.

In 1920, only thirty years after its invention, a game between CCNY and NYU drew 10,000 spectators. College administrators began to envision the economic viability of making intercollegiate basketball a big-time sport as receipts now matched those of the professional basketball gate. The emerging popularity of the sport during the 1920s and early 1930s prompted sports buff

1. Quoted in John D. McCallum, *College Basketball. U.S.A.: Since 1892* (New York: Stein and Day, 1978), 94.

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and New York City Mayor Jimmy Walker to ask Ned Irish, then a young reporter for the *New York World-Telegram*, to arrange a college basketball program to raise funds for relief of the city's unemployed. In December, 1931, a capacity crowd watched six New York City colleges play a triple-header at Madison Square Garden. Similar exhibitions in the subsequent two winters also drew capacity crowds.²

Sensing the lucrative financial potential of promoting and staging college basketball games, Irish quit his job at the newspaper and became known as the "Boy Promoter."³ In December, 1934, he rented the Garden and put together a doubleheader witnessed by 16,188 people as NYU defeated Notre Dame and Westminster beat St. John's. The next season, eight college doubleheaders booked by Irish attracted almost 100,000 customers. Soon Irish could guarantee an attractive percentage to good teams from other geographical locations. Madison Square Garden became synonymous with quality, big-time, pressurized college basketball. Every schoolboy in the country dreamed about playing there, while college administrators, with their emerging commercialized basketball programs, eagerly courted and welcomed the opportunity to make a big pay day at the Garden. Soon promoters in other cities like Chicago, Detroit and Kansas City were staging similar intersectional games in public arenas⁴

The increase in gambling on college basketball paralleled its increased spectator popularity. In the beginning, gamblers would simply get odds on a game. On a straight betting basis, if a team was an eight-to-five favorite, a gambler would put up eight dollars to win five betting the favorite, or five to win eight betting the underdog. Understandably, few gamblers were prepared to risk money on a game between two mismatched teams. Despite the limitations of the straight betting system, betting on college basketball steadily increased and rumors of fixes, mainly from bookies and newspaper accounts, surfaced with increasing regularity.⁵ In March, 1931, the *Brooklyn Eagle* reported that Max Posnack, the diminutive guard on St. John's Wonder Five, had been offered \$3,000 to throw a home game against Manhattan⁶ Less than one month after Irish staged the first doubleheader in the Garden, the *New York Herald Tribune* sounded the alarm and reported:

Basketball has been adopted by those unerring feelers of the public pulse, the betting commissioners. Fifty thousand, the peak of the betting to date, changed hands on the recent Temple-N.Y.U. game at the Garden.⁷

To minimize their losses and facilitate betting in college basketball, bookies in the early 1940s invented a point spread covering a three-point range. A team might be quoted as a six-eight favorite, which meant that the bettor collected if

2. Charles Rosen. *Scandals of 51: How the Gamblers Almost Killed College Basketball* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970) 22.

3. John Russell, *Honey Russell :Between Games Between Halves* (San Francisco: Dryad Press, 1986). 12,13.

4. Stanley Cohen, *The Game They Played* (New York: Farm. Straus and Giroux, 1977). 58-59.

5. *Ibid.*, 28.

6. *Brooklyn Eagle*, 2 March, 1931, 48.

7. *New York Herald*, 19 January, 1935, 16.

the favorite won by eight or more, while a bet on the underdog paid off if the game was lost by six or fewer. If the favorite won by seven points, all bets were lost. Bettors soon discovered the hazards of this system as an unusually large number of games seemed to hit the middle and nobody won except the bookie. An adjustment was made where only one point line was given, usually with a half point tacked on to avert a tie, or in bookie parlance, a push.⁸ Thus, if a team was a seven-and-a-half-point favorite, it would have to win by eight for its backers to win. If it won by seven or fewer, the underdog won. Theoretically, the point spread made every game even.

The spread was the gambler's delight and opened up new possibilities for players. When the point spread was big enough, nine to twelve points for example, a small group of players on the favored team or even one player could control the points with little fear of detection by coaches and teammates. A gambler, wanting to ensure a big bet, could offer a piece of the profits to one or more players on the favored team. The players would be able to win twice—they would win the game and the bet—not by losing, but by shaving or dumping points. Shaving and dumping meant the same thing; players who agreed to shave would make sure their favored team won by less than the point spread. On the other hand, throwing the game involved players losing the game outright by more than the spread. Shaving was always more difficult than throwing the game. Uncorrupted teammates could spoil the fix by having an unusually good game or the opposing team might be playing so poorly that players shaving points would have to play unusually bad.⁹

One of the methods utilized by gamblers to soften up players for fixing was to meet and socialize with them during the summer months. In the early 1930s, resort owners in the Catskill Mountains, north of New York City, saw the possibility of an added attraction—entertain the guests with college basketball players. Within a few years nearly all of the 200 resorts were fielding a liveried basketball team. Basketball players jumped at the opportunity to earn extra money, have a good time, play competitive ball and sharpen their skills. The ball games kept the guests, some of them gamblers, and their money on the hotel premises. In any given summer, there were perhaps 500 varsity basketball players employed in the Catskills.¹⁰ In addition to salaries and tips, the players had another source of substantial income. A hat was passed around the stands and guests could pick a number for a dollar. The idea was to match the total number of points scored in the ball game. Players often split the pot with the prearranged winner by ensuring that only a specific number of points would be scored. If a chosen guest had number 150, the players would make sure that was all the points scored. The fix was working even in the summertime.¹¹

Several alliances were forged between players and gamblers at these resorts.

8. Cohen, *The Game They Played*, 59.

9. *Ibid.*, 60.

10. Neil D. Isaacs, *All the Moves: A History of College Basketball* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1975), 102-108.

11. *New York Daily Mirror*, 21 November, 1951, 21.

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Some of the associations were initiated by players such as Eddie Gard of LIU, who was looking for someone with enough money to finance a city full of corrupt teams. He found his bankroll in Salvatore Sallazzo, a New York jeweler and gambler, whom he had met at a resort in the Catskills. University of Oklahoma players Jim Terrell, Marcus Freiburger and Doug Lynn told the student newspaper at Norman how they had met Sallazzo at a Catskill resort and were invited to a party at his sumptuous Central Park apartment the night before they played CCNY at the Garden. They described how they were softened up by Sallazzo in the summer resort country before he followed up with a bribe offer they refused when they came to New York City.¹²

By the start of the 1944-45 season, the future of college basketball looked bright despite frequent reports from bookies that players were being contacted and offered bribes to fix games. Early in the season police provided all college coaches in New York City with a secret phone number to call if any of their players were approached by gamblers.¹³ During the season, CCNY's star player Paul Schmones was offered a bribe by teammate Lenny Hassman who had a reputation among his teammates as a dumper. Schmones reported the offer to CCNY coach Nat Holman. Holman dropped Hassman from the team and reported the incident to Frank Lloyd, Chair of the Department of Hygiene. The two decided to keep the offer a secret.¹⁴ The risk of giving the game a bad name by exposing a disease that had grown virtually unchecked was outweighed by the unparalleled gate receipts the game was now generating.

In January, 1945, five Brooklyn College players confessed to accepting bribes totaling \$1,000 to throw the upcoming Brooklyn College-University of Akron game scheduled in the Boston Garden. The five players, Bernard Barnett, Jerome Green, Robert Leder, Larry Pearlstein and Stanley Simon, were detected by accident. Two detectives who were watching Henry Rosen, suspected of being a fence for garment thefts, observed Barnett and Pearlstein entering the suspect's house. The two players panicked when approached and readily admitted receiving \$1,000 from Rosen to split among their other three teammates.¹⁵ The five basketball players, Coach Tubby Raskin, two detectives and two Assistant District Attorneys appeared before the Grand Jury which voted indictments against Rosen, Harvey Stemmer and another man only identified as "Danny." The three men were convicted and sentenced to a year in jail and a \$500 fine.

Following the Grand Jury indictments, Brooklyn Borough Councilman Peter Cacchione expressed his deep apprehension regarding the use of public arenas for private profit in a letter to Ordway Tead, Chairman of the New York City Board of Higher Education. Mr. Tead defended the use of Madison Square Garden on the basis that "students at the city colleges are anxious to be part of

12. Robert Rice, *The Business of Crime* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1956), 251-261. Rice offers a penetrating analysis of Salvatore Sallazzo as a businessman and gambler.

13. *The Sporting News*, 8 February, 1945, 21.

14. "Report of the Committee on Intercollegiate Basketball to Board of Higher Education," 17 November, 1952, 21, "Scandals" Folder, City College of New York Archives (hereafter referred to as CCNYA).

15. *The Sporting News*, 8 February, 1945, 21.

the intercollegiate games scheduled at Madison Square Garden. There is prestige in being included. They become part of the national community of colleges and many educators feel there is sound educational value in intercollegiate contests. It is not possible to have these contests on any of our campuses because we have no gymnasiums large enough.”¹⁶

In his regular Sunday WNYC broadcast on March 11, 1945, New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia announced that one of the players involved in the Brooklyn scandal had, in fact, never been enrolled in the college though he had worn the school colors for a year.¹⁷ The player, Larry Pearlstein, readily admitted he had never attended classes. La Guardia indicated the situation reflected “laxity, indifference and negligence by the faculty, and borders on the unpardonable.”¹⁸ The possibility of an exceptional player being planted in a college by gamblers was also raised by New York State Assemblyman William Glancy of Manhattan following the disclosure that in addition to Pearlstein, Jack Laub, a player on the CCNY team, had not been a qualified student even though he had been allowed to play in six games in 1945.¹⁹

While the Brooklyn college scandal prompted some college officials to ban their team from playing in the Garden, a rule which the Big Ten had enforced on its teams for years, the nation’s major colleges were reaching deep into their money bags to finance a \$25,000,000 building program designed for the post-war boom. Big name schools such as Princeton and Cornell in the East, Ohio State, Michigan and Wisconsin in the Midwest and Kentucky, Texas A&M and Tulane in the South were planning to spend millions of dollars to construct fieldhouses, coliseums and sports fields.²⁰ College football had retained its position as the number one amateur spectator sport after World War II. Competing to fill large stadiums which had been built before the war, several colleges escalated their football programs to a point where the financial resources necessary to conduct a competitive program forced many of the smaller schools to drop football and enter the business of big-time basketball. The costs were modest in comparison to football, and the recruitment of one or two outstanding players might ensure a team a post-season playoff, a high rating in the national press polls, “free” publicity and profits. Basketball could offer a relatively simple and inexpensive means by which a relatively obscure and unknown smaller institution could attract national attention.²¹

Profits from the basketball programs at many schools supported a variety of college activities. They paid the salaries of everyone connected with the games—the coaches, the referees, the ushers and the ticket takers. Everyone shared in the profits except the players who brought the patrons through the

16. Ordway Tead letter to Peter V. Cacchione, 21 February, 1945, “Athletics” Folder, Brooklyn College Archives.

17. *New York Times*, 12 March, 1945, 1.

18. *New York Herald Tribune*, 14 March, 1945, 20.

19. *New York Times*, 17 March, 1945, 32.

20. *The Sporting News*, 8 February, 1945, 21.

21. For a discussion on the effects of the post-war boom on college basketball see: Benjamin G. Reader, *American Sports* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1983), chapter 13, James A. Michener, *Sports in America* (New York: Random House, 1976), Chapter Seven, and McCallum, *College Basketball*, 79-92.

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turnstiles. The players, of course, were well aware of just how valuable a property they were. Functioning in an environment where point shaving was as much a part of college basketball as the two-hand set shot, they were treated as professionals in all respects but one; they were not paid for their efforts. Many followed the example of college officials who were in charge of the sport—they tampered with the rules. If a player could be recruited rather than bought, and subsidized without being paid, a player, in turn, might rationalize that he could control the score of a game without really losing it. And, unlike football or other team sports where a larger number of players were needed to execute intricate team patterns, basketball lent itself more easily to manipulation. Stated one player who regularly fixed games: “You simply play your hardest on offense, score as many points as you can—then make simple mistakes on defense. So you let a man you’re supposed to guard get a half step on you. He breaks loose and scores, but who can say you didn’t try to stop him.”²²

Relative calm characterized college basketball until CCNY Coach Nat Holman stated at a weekly sports writers’ meeting, that “he believed another scandal similar to the previous one at Brooklyn College would break out during the 1947-48 season.”²³ He was not alone in that belief. Leonard Cohen reported in the *New York Post* that an attempt was made to fix an upcoming game between CCNY and Syracuse at the Garden in early 1948. Dr. Sam Winograd, the athletic director at CCNY, admitted he had received instructions from his superiors to say “no comment” to the press on the reported receipt of a telegram warning of the attempted fix.²⁴ In a prophetic letter to President Harry Wright of CCNY following Cohen’s article, Mrs. Maude Stewart, Director of Information Service for the New York Board of Education, proposed a solution to the gambling problem at the Garden:

. . . Because of the rumors this would be a strategic time to consider taking the game out of the Garden and going to the public with a strong demand for funds to offset the loss from Garden receipts. You have the strongest plea in the world—character versus money—don’t you agree?

If something should happen (and I join you devoutly hoping it doesn’t), and if then you decide to leave the Garden, you lose almost all the advantage you have now for then it would be said, he knew about it, for it was published. Why did he wait until something happened?²⁵

President Wright informed Mrs. Stewart that her suggestion was not acceptable to officials who were in charge of the games. Thus, CCNY, NYU, St. John’s, Brooklyn, Manhattan and LIU continued to justify exposing their players to the pressures of playing in Madison Square Garden by demonstrating that basketball revenues supported their entire athletic program.

Playing in the Garden exposed all players to accusations of dumping and dealing with gamblers. Missed shots were often followed by shouts of “he’s

22. Quoted in Cohen, *The Game They Played*. 58.

23. *New York Post*, 16 January, 1948, 3.

24. “Report and Recommendations of Board of Higher Education of the city of New York in the matter of Charges Preferred Against Nat Holman and Robert Sand,” 19 February, 1954, 9, “Scandals” Folder, CCNYA.

25. Mrs. Maude Stewart letter to President Harry Wright, 19 January, 1948. “Scandals” Folder, CCNYA.

dumping,” or a player with a hot hand might be accused of betting on his own team. On many occasions, a disgruntled gambler who stood to lose a wager would run down to the bench during the game and loudly pronounce his displeasure to the coaches and players. It was not unusual for the crowd to be on its feet during the last two minutes of a game, wildly cheering the team that was behind by 10 or 15 points. Spectators were exhorting the team not to lose by more than the point spread.²⁶

Despite the numerous rumors, reports and specific incidents of reported bribes and fixing, college administrators, coaches and the NCAA continued to view the problem primarily as one created by a few gamblers who frequented Madison Square Garden. At the NCAA convention in 1948, Dr. Karl Leib, the Association’s president from the University of Iowa, recognized some sentiment for the return of the NCAA basketball championships to campus courts and reported that this might be done in the future as acceptable campus facilities became available. He further pointed out that the need for revenue was paramount at the time, and stated: “we owe a big debt to the Garden for saving basketball during the war years when we had to take the game to the public because transportation difficulties kept the public from seeing the game.”²⁷ The 1947 regional playoffs held at Madison Square Garden and Kansas City’s Municipal Auditorium and the championship game at the Garden were the NCAA’s chief source of income, contributing \$57,635 to its coffers. The only recognition of the problem of money and basketball came at the close of the convention when member institutions adopted the Sanity Code which outlined “principles for the conduct of intercollegiate athletics.”²⁸ The code delineated conditions under which athletes could properly receive subsidies, but made no reference to the growing problem of gambling and collegiate basketball.

In January, 1949, New York City District Attorney Frank Hogan announced the arrests of four men for attempting to bribe George Washington University co-captain David Shapiro. Shapiro had been approached in Brooklyn by gambler Joseph Aronowitz, one of the four arrested. Shapiro reported the meeting to authorities and agreed to “play bait.” Six months of cat and mouse intrigue transpired before he agreed to accept a bribe and fix a game with Manhattan.²⁹ Jack Levy, Philip Klein and William Rivlin, the three other gamblers involved in the bribe offer were also arrested. Reportedly, gamblers who believed the fix was on bet on Manhattan and lost \$5,000,000. The four men were arraigned in Felony Court on a charge of conspiracy in violation of Section 382 of the Penal Code; the bill passed in the state of New York following the Brooklyn College scandal.³⁰ Aronowitz, Klein and Levy were sentenced to from 15 months to two and a half years in jail and Rivlin to one year in jail. At the sentencing, Judge Jonah Goldstein noted that the four men were small-time

26. *New York Post*, 16 January, 1948, 49.

27. *New York Times*, 11 January, 1948, 48.

28. *Ibid.*, 48.

29. *New York Journal-American*, 5 January, 1949, 39.

30. *New York Post*, 5 January, 1949, 3.

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gamblers, and stated in part: “the case did not represent a wholesale conspiracy and the firmness of the law would serve as a deterrent to others who might be similarly inclined.”³¹

Law enforcement officials believed this case was not part of a wider conspiracy, but specific factors surrounding the bribe offer indicated otherwise. Shapiro, a 25-year-old war hero and law student living on a G.I. Bill, would clearly give serious thought to jeopardizing his future career for \$500. If this case was indeed not part of a wider conspiracy, one would have to believe that either Shapiro appeared to be the most corruptible or that many other players had been offered bribes and had failed to report the incidents. And, further, although three of the gamblers lived in New York City, they had traveled to Washington, D.C. on at least two occasions to induce Shapiro to fix games at the beginning of the 1948-49 season.³² It was not too long after this incident that questions regarding a wider conspiracy and the extent to which gambling had illegally penetrated college basketball would be answered.

II

By the early winter of the 1950-51 season, the foul air of a scandal hung over college basketball like a menace. Bookies were taking a financial bath each time a game was fixed. To protect themselves, they began to tip newspaper writers that certain games were being manipulated. Stan Isaacs, of the *New York Journal American*, had written a column in January which fingered LIU as a team routinely fixing games.³³ One week after the column appeared on newsstands, Isaacs reported that a certain coach (presumably Clair Bee of LIU) had shown him the column and advised he shouldn't be “writing stuff like that,” that it was not good for the game. “Unless someone starts writing stuff like that,” Isaacs retorted, “something's going to break that won't be the least bit good for the game.”³⁴ It was too late—something had already happened.

In January, 1951, Junius Kellogg, the first black ever to play for the Manhattan College varsity basketball team, was offered \$1,000 to fix the upcoming game with De Paul by Hank Poppe.³⁵ Poppe was one of Manhattan's co-captains during 1949-50 season, and had scored 1,027 points during his varsity career. In contrast to Shapiro, Kellogg was raised poor, one of a family of 11 in Portsmouth, Virginia and appeared to be a player who could be easily corrupted. Believing he had convinced Kellogg, Poppe explained the nuances of the trade to him:

It's easy! You can miss a rebound once in a while. After you get a rebound don't look to pass it down court. Hang on to it and give the defense a chance to set up. Then you can try shooting your hook shot a little hard. And don't try to block the other guy's shot. Throw the ball away when you get the chance. Just remember that Manhattan doesn't actually have to lose the game. All you have to do is control

31. *New York Post*, 11 March, 1949, 1

32. *Ibid.*, 21.

33. *New York Journal-American*, 10 January, 1951, 48

34. Quoted in Cohen, *The Game They Played*, 78.

35. *New York Times*, 18 January, 1951, 3.

the margin of victory. It's easy Junie. Everybody's doing it everywhere all over the country. The pros too. But whatever you do, Junie, don't stink up the joint. Make it look like you're trying.³⁶

Kellogg immediately reported the bribe offer to authorities and Poppe was arrested at his home in Queens the morning after the game, and John Byrnes, the other co-captain on the 1949-50 team, was apprehended two hours later. Three other men were arrested: Cornelius Kelleher and Benjamin and Irving Schwartzberg. The brothers were bookmakers, felons and ex-convicts. Kelleher had approached Poppe and Byrnes prior to the 1949-50 season and paid them \$40 a week until they began playing games. Each was paid \$3,000 to ensure that Manhattan lost games against Siena, Santa Clara and Bradley, all played at Madison Square Garden. The pair was also paid \$2,000 each to help Manhattan exceed the point spread during the same season against St. Francis and New York University.³⁷

A little over a month after the Manhattan scandal, Nat Holman and his CCNY team defeated Temple 95-71, boarded a train and headed back to New York City. As the train was leaving Camden, New Jersey, two detectives approached the coach and indicated that they wanted to speak to Ed Roman, Alvin Roth and Ed Warner, three players who had been instrumental in leading CCNY to the winning of the NIT and NCAA championships-the grand slam of collegiate basketball the previous season. On February 18, 1951, District Attorney Hogan announced the arrests of Warner, Roman, Roth, Connie Schaff of NYU and Eddie Gard, the former LIU player who was accused of being the contact-man between the CCNY players and gambler Salvatore Sallazzo.³⁸ The CCNY players admitted throwing or deliberately losing three games during the current 1950-51 season against a clearly inferior Missouri team, Arizona and Boston College. The Missouri venture netted each player \$1,500, for the Arizona game each received \$1,000, and Roth was the only one paid \$1,400 after the Boston College game. The three CCNY players each received \$250 bonuses for a game CCNY won against Washington State and \$250 each for a game CCNY lost to St. John's that same season.³⁹ Indictments were sought against Roman, Roth and Warner for accepting bribes, against Gard for giving a bribe and Schaff for offering a bribe to teammate Jim Brasco. All the money in the plot was put up by Sallazzo, who was also indicted.⁴⁰

Two days after the arrests of the CCNY players, LIU players Sherman White, Adolf Bigos and Leroy Smith admitted their complicity in the slowly emerging scandal and were arrested. The three admitted receiving \$18,500 to shave points in seven games during the 1949-50 and 1950-51 seasons. During the 1949-50 season they admitted fixing games against North Carolina State, Cincinnati and in their NIT opener against Syracuse. The following season the players did business with gamblers in games against Kansas State, Denver, Idaho and

36. Quoted in Rosen, *Scandals of '51*, 3.

37. *New York Times*, 18 January, 1951, 30.

38. *New York Daily News*, 19 February, 1951, 3.

39. *New York Times*, 19 February, 1951, 40.

40. *Ibid.*, 40.

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Bowling Green.⁴¹ White, who had led LIU to a 20-4 record and a ranking of sixteenth in the country during the 1950-51 season, was only 77 points away from setting an all-time collegiate scoring record and had been named Player of the Year by *The Sporting News*.⁴² The country's most prolific scorer now became a marked man and stood to forfeit a salary of \$65,000 over five years and at least \$35,000 from testimonials he would have received as a professional in the NBA. White's father was heartbroken: "It would have been different," he said, "if Sherman was raised on the streets. But Sherman had to go to college to learn something he was never taught at home." White's father, who had attended all of his son's collegiate games and had seen him play since junior high school, suspected something and asked several times: "What's the matter Sherman? You don't seem to be playing like you used to. Is something wrong?"⁴³ White later admitted that lying to his father hurt him deeply. White's involvement in the scandal reflected the dilemma many players encountered as they entered a collegiate program where fixing had become a time-honored tradition. At LIU fixing had become so commonplace that even students knew games were being manipulated. Faced with the prospect of touching off a scandal of sizeable proportions by reporting a bribe offer, an overwhelming number of players chose to remain silent, or like White, join in the fixing of games.

Soon after the arrests of the CCNY and LIU players, accounts of other involved players began to appear in the newspapers. Floyd Layne had played on the grand slam CCNY team of 1949-50 and was named co-captain of the 1951 team after Warner, Roth and Roman were arrested. He readily admitted his complicity with the three other CCNY players and confessed to accepting \$3,000 as his share in the three fixed games during the 1950-51 season. LIU player Natie Miller was charged with throwing two games during the 1948-49 season when the team played Bowling Green and Western Kentucky.⁴⁴ Following the arrests of Layne and Miller, three more CCNY players were arrested: Irwin Dambrot, Norm Mager and Herb Cohen were charged with fixing games during the 1949-50 grand slam season. The three players, along with Roth and Roman, admitted fixing games against Southern Methodist and UCLA. Mager, Roth and Cohen also admitted fixing the Niagara game that season. Lou Lipman, a high scorer on the 1947-48 and 1948-49 LIU teams, was charged with fixing one game while LIU player Dick Feurtado admitted his complicity in fixing three games during the 1949-50 season and one game the season before. Also arrested was Jackie Goldsmith, who as a sophomore had set a LIU single season scoring record with 395 points. He was reputed to be the master fixer of the scandal. After not playing his senior year, he had become intimate with the underworld and was described as "responsible for the corruption of more college basketball players than any other single person."⁴⁵ Apparently, his

41. *New York World-Telegram and Sun*, 22 February, 1951, 1

42. Sherman White, "The Basketball Fix." *Sport* 17 (July, 1951), 77

43. *Ibid.*, 76.

44. *New York Post*, 28 February, 1951, 3.

45. *New York Journal-American*, 21 May, 1951, 28.

mob connections influenced his decision not to reveal anything regarding his involvement in the scandal as he steadfastly refused to cooperate with the District Attorney's office.

As the full extent of the scandals involving the New York City colleges was reported by newspapers throughout the country, there was a tendency in mainstream middle America to blame the entire problem on the evil ambience of New York City. It was commonly reported that name players had been seduced by smooth city gamblers who had insinuated themselves into their inexperienced lives with smiling assurances of the good life and easy conscience. This parochial attitude was quickly dispelled in July, 1951 when the New York City District Attorney's Office announced the gambling scandal had touched Toledo, Ohio. The University of Toledo had concluded the 1950-51 year with a 22-7 record and a national ranking of fourteenth. The Rockets had become such a powerhouse in the Midwest that after beating Michigan and Illinois decisively during the 1950-51 season both schools removed themselves from Toledo's schedule. Gamblers had frequented Toledo's home games regularly. During the 1949-50 season uniformed police had to keep the gamblers from sitting near the Toledo bench where they often shouted instructions to players. Toledo bookmakers had informed university officials that some Toledo players had wagered on and fixed the December, 1950 game against Niagara.⁴⁶ As a result, university officials appealed to local law enforcement officials to help stop organized gambling on Toledo's games. Numerous Toledo gambling establishments were raided and Toledo's games were taken off the boards for a few days.⁴⁷

Toledo's involvement in the scandal was revealed when players Bob McDonald, Bill Walker and Carlo Muzi were questioned by the New York City District Attorney's Office. Brooklynite Joe Massa, a star on the Toledo freshman team, had worked in the Catskills with Walker, a varsity player who had led the country in assists in 1951. Prior to the 1950-51 season, Massa had introduced Walker to gambler Eli Kaye, who offered \$250 a game for every player Walker could recruit, and an additional \$250 for his troubles. Soon teammates Muzi, McDonald and "Jumping Jack" Freeman joined Walker and began doing business with Kaye and Jack Rubinstein, a bookie from Brooklyn and friend of Massa. Since Ohio had no bribing law for amateur athletics and none of the fixed games took place in New York, the players were beyond the jurisdiction of New York's bribery law. Freeman was shielded by Walker, Muzi and McDonald but the trio implicated Massa as the contact man. Freeman's complicity was later reported by an intracollegiate investigatory committee headed by Toledo University President Asa Knowles.⁴⁹ Walker, Muzi and McDonald admitted to shaving points in the 1950 Niagara game. Freeman, who did not know about the

46. *Toledo Blade*, 26 July, 1951, 1.

47. *Ibid.*, 10.

48. *Toledo Times*, 26 July, 1951, 1.

49. "Statement on Basketball," Asa S. Knowles papers, July 27, 1951, 1, University of Toledo Archives (hereafter referred to as UTA).

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Niagara fix, admitted his complicity along with the other three in games against Bowling Green and Xavier during the 1950-51 season.⁵⁰

Simultaneous with the disclosure of Toledo's involvement in the scandal, detectives from New York City appeared in Peoria, Illinois and arrested Bradley players Gene Melchiorre, Bill Mann and Mike Chianakas for fixing the 1949 Bradley-Bowling Green NIT consolation game in Madison Square Garden. Teammates Charles Grover, Fred Schlichtman, Aaron Preese and Jim Kelly, along with the three players arrested by New York authorities, admitted to a Peoria Grand Jury that they had also fixed games against TCU, Washington State, St. Joseph's and Oregon State during the 1949-50 season.⁵¹ Only Melchiorre, who had been fingered as the orchestrator of the fixes, was indicted by the Peoria Grand Jury and later given probation. In the 1951 draft he had been pro basketball's first draft choice. Since one of the fixed games was played in New York City, the District Attorney's Office obtained indictments against Melchiorre, Mann and Chianakas. Also indicted were gamblers Nick and Tony Englesis of Brooklyn, Joe Benintende, who had close connections with organized crime, and Jack West, questioned in 1947 in connection with an alleged \$100,000 bribe offer to boxer Rocky Graziano.⁵²

Bradley University's involvement in the scandal reflected the pervasiveness and magnitude of the gambling problem which by now had college officials reeling in confusion. The scandal had touched low key and uncommercialized basketball programs such as Brooklyn College, small private schools such as Bradley and LIU and soon large public institutions like the University of Kentucky. Bradley's involvement revealed that not only were the gamblers offering bribes to players, but players were offering to fix games for gamblers. Preese had called Kaye numerous times in New York to see if the involved players could do business and sell certain games. Bradley's coach Fordy Anderson reported that he observed some players receiving money in the locker room after games from unknown individuals. He revealed that for two years Nick Englesis had traveled with the team to all road games. Englesis had been assigned this task while employed by Kaye to ensure that the team knew which way to fix specific games. Players testified that on some occasions the fix was on both ways when two teams played each other. In the January, 1950 Bradley-Manhattan game, Kaye had given Melchiorre \$500 to dump, while Poppe and Byrnes were dumping for Manhattan. The amount of money gamblers offered was staggering. To dump the NCAA final game against CCNY in 1950 Melchiorre was offered and refused \$10,000 from Benintende. In some instances, gamblers were winning \$80,000 a game.⁵³

Stanley Woodward, writing for *Sport* magazine in January, 1951, just before the first scandal broke, stated that he believed "most of the finagling has been centered in New York City where gambling on college basketball games is far

50. "Minutes of the Meeting of the University of Toledo Board of Directors," 27 July, 1951, 2, UTA

51. *Peoria Journal*, 25 July, 1951, 1.

52. *New York Post*, 18 August, 1951, 3.

53. *Toledo Blade*, 28 July, 1951, 29.

more common than anywhere else in the country.” He further described Lexington, Kentucky as “a small-town community, crazy about its basketball team, where there is little betting. The citizens of Lexington are probably as basketball-conscious as any men and women in the country. But they don’t bet much, and there is absolutely no organized bookmaking such as you find in the larger metropolitan areas.”⁵⁴ Woodward’s observations were uncharacteristically naive for a sportswriter. For years it had been sportswriters with their close associations with bookies who had publicly reported bribe offers, fixed games and the specific nature of the gambling problem in college basketball. Furthermore, Louisville had always been one of the biggest book-making centers in the country, and when horse racing became illegal during World War II, Kentucky gamblers shifted their trade to college football and basketball games.⁵⁵

With the October, 1951 arrests of Ralph Beard, Alex Groza and Dale Barnstable, the New York City District Attorney’s Office revealed that the trio had thrown Kentucky’s first-round NIT game against Loyola in Madison Square Garden in 1949. The Wildcats, who had been 10 point favorites, were soundly defeated 67-56. Following the game Coach Adolph Rupp commented to Athletic Director Bernie Shively that “he believed something was wrong with his team.”⁵⁶ His suspicions that his team had manipulated the game were not unfounded. Kentucky had compiled the best overall won-loss record after World War II and had been the most profitable collegiate basketball program in the country. In 1948, the team won the NCAA Championship and was selected to represent the United States in the Olympics where they won a Gold Medal. After their eligibility ran out, All-Americans Groza and Beard, starters Wah-Wah Jones and Cliff Barker and reserve Joe Holland had signed as a unit to play for the new Indianapolis franchise in the NBA. During the 1948-49 collegiate season, they had won 29 out of 30 games, including the last 21 in a row, before throwing the game to Loyola. Thus, in 1949, Rupp was looking to be the first coach to win both the NIT and NCAA titles—a feat accomplished by CCNY’s Holman a year later.⁵⁷ After the Loyola loss, the Wildcats would go on and win the NCAA title and become the first team to win successive NCAA titles.

By today’s standards, the throwing of the NIT game by players who had so much to gain by winning the dual titles seems barely conceivable. But, given the impunity with which games had been fixed, and the naive attitude of college administrators, coaches and the NCAA, sabotaging an event as important as the NIT final was merely symptomatic of the depth and pervasiveness of the gambling problem in college basketball. The players no doubt saw nothing wrong in what they were doing; they had done it before. Beard recalled in an interview, “myself and others received sums of money at various times from alumni members after a good game. We felt that receiving money from

54. Stanley Woodward, “Basketball Betting: An Open Scandal,” *Sport* 1 (January, 1951). 14.

55. *Louisville Times*, 4 November, 1952, 10.

56. *Lexington Herald*, 15 March, 1949, 1.

57. Sandy Padwe, *Basketball’s Hall of Fame* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970). 126

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gamblers was no worse than receiving money from alumni members.”⁵⁸ There was also a degree of self-righteousness involved. The players were heroes in a basketball-mad city, underpaid and on occasion treated unfairly by their coach. Rupp always maintained that any winning coach “has to blur the line” in recruiting athletes, motivating them and keeping them in school.⁵⁹

The New York City District Attorney’s Office alleged 11 of Kentucky’s games were fixed during the 1948-49 season. The implicated players had been approached by Nick and Tony Englesis and Saul Feinberg, a former Harvard law student, while in New York City for the St. John’s game. Allegedly, plans were made to fix more games that season. Beard, Groza and Barnstable admitted to fixing three games: De Paul in Chicago, Tennessee in Lexington and the Loyola game in New York City. For the De Paul game, each player received \$100, the Tennessee game earned the players a total of \$500, and for the Loyola game, Beard and Barnstable each received \$500 and Groza \$1,000.⁶⁰ Since Kentucky also had no statutes covering sports bribery, the players could only be indicted for the Loyola game at the Garden.

Like Sherman White of LIU, the losses incurred by Beard and Groza were substantial. Two years earlier, the \$50,000 pro contract package they had signed with Indianapolis included a share of the profits. In addition, they owned 70% of the stock with an option to buy the franchise within three years. The NBA team was immediately successful as it won a divisional title its first year and qualified for the playoffs each of its first two years. Indianapolis drew good crowds both at home and on the road. Like the other players in the scandal, the NBA barred them for life and they were forced to sell their stock at 10% of its initial purchase value.⁶¹

Following the revelations of Kentucky’s fixed games during the 1948-49 season, the New York City District Attorney’s Office uncovered further evidence that University of Kentucky players Walter Hirsch, Jim Line and Bill Spivey had continued to fix games during the 1949-50 and 1950-51 seasons. Line and Hirsch admitted their complicity but Spivey steadfastly maintained he had never fixed any game while at Kentucky. His contention was disputed by Hirsch, who testified to New York Assistant District Attorney Vincent O’Connor, that Spivey “had done business” in the December, 1950 Sugar Bowl game against St. Louis. Also implicating Spivey was Line, who testified that “Spivey talked with Hirsch and me before practically every game played in December, 1950, and January, 1951 about the possibilities and arrangements for deals.”⁶² No charges could be preferred against Line and Hirsch since none of the states where they fixed games had bribery laws for amateur sports. Spivey was later indicted for first degree perjury by failing to truthfully testify to a New York Grand Jury that he had received \$1,000 from gambler Jack West for the Sugar

58. Humbert S. Nelli. “Adolph Rupp, the Kentucky Wildcats, and the Basketball Scandal of 1951,” *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 84 (Winter, 1986): 56.

59. *Ibid.*, 57.

60. *Lexington Herald*, October 23, 1951, 1.

61. *Louisville-Courier Journal*, 23 February, 1952, 1.

62. Nelli, “Adolph Rupp and the Kentucky Scandal,” 64.

Bowl Game and for games against De Paul and Notre Dame in January, 1951. The death of Eli Kaye, who had initially approached Spivey in the summer of 1950 in the Catskills, and West's insistence on withdrawing his guilty plea in exchange for his testimony against Spivey weakened the prosecution's case. The jury was unable to reach a verdict and O'Connor moved for dismissal of the perjury charge against Spivey in April, 1953.⁶³ University of Kentucky's officials were not so lenient with Spivey. Dean of Students Albert Kirwan, who represented the institution during the scandal, interviewed Spivey who testified to him that he had never fixed a game while playing at Kentucky. Of course, this statement was rebutted by testimony from the other players and involved gamblers. The Board of Directors of the University of Kentucky Athletics Association proclaimed unanimously: "there is very substantial evidence tending to show that William Spivey was involved in a conspiracy to fix the Sugar Bowl basketball tournament in December, 1950."⁶⁴ Spivey was suspended permanently from all athletic teams at Kentucky and banned for life by the NBA. The seven footer, like Smith, Groza and Beard, stood to lose a substantial amount of money. A consensus All-American selection in 1951, he had led Kentucky to the NCAA title in 1951 and undoubtedly would have been a number one draft pick in the professional draft.⁶⁵

III

In November, 1951, Judge Saul Streit began sentencing the first indicted players and gamblers. They were the CCNY, NYU and LIU players along with Sallazzo, Gard and Goldsmith. Of all the active players from the New York City schools only Warner, Roth, White and Schaff received jail sentences. The other indicted players received suspended sentences. Gard received a jail term of up to three years for two counts of conspiracy, and Goldsmith was sentenced to two and a half years. Sallazzo received a sentence of from eight to 16 years.⁶⁶

While the sentencing was relatively routine, Judge Streit's remarks regarding the role of college officials and coaches in the scandal and the whole system of collegiate athletics bore a striking resemblance to the Carnegie Report of 1929.⁶⁷ The judge had thoroughly investigated abuses in collegiate sports and his remarks were primarily directed at basketball programs. He documented a chronicle of commercialization, subsidization, recruitment and a multitude of academic abuses. He recounted the way college administrators doctored high school transcripts, the way coaches openly bid for the services of athletes by offering gifts and money, the manner in which wages were paid for bogus jobs and a variety of other offenses including forgery, exploitation, bribery, fraud

63. "Remarks of Assistant District Attorney Vincent A. G. O'Connor in moving the Dismissal of the Perjury Indictment against William G. Spivey," 15 April, 1953, 1. "Basketball" Folder, University of Kentucky Archives (hereafter referred to as UKA).

64. "Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Directors of the University of Kentucky Athletics Association," 2 March, 1952, 6. "Basketball" folder, UKA.

65. Padwe. *Basketball's Hall of Fame*, 131.

66. *New York Journal-American*, 19 November, 1951, 1.

67. *Ibid.*, 23.

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and enrolling of athletes in perfunctory courses.⁶⁸ Citing LIU as the acme of commercialization in college athletics, Streit illustrated how coaches' salaries, scholarships, traveling, equipment and publicity expenses made basketball a business venture well worth the investment to college administrators who believed the sport brought prestige and publicity to their institutions. Noting that LIU was not alone in the business of commercializing athletics, he cited Michigan, Bradley, Ohio State, Oklahoma and Kentucky as institutions which made LIU look like a small-time operation by comparison. Fixing the blame for the corruption in intercollegiate basketball on college administrators, coaches and alumni, Streit commented: "The naivete, the equivocation and the denials of the coaches and their assistants concerning their knowledge of gambling, recruiting and subsidizing would be comical were they not so despicable."⁶⁹ Referring to the players, he intoned: "The acts of these defendants are merely the symptoms of the disease."⁷⁰

Later, the New York City Board of Higher Education preferred charges of conduct unbecoming a teacher and neglect of duty against Holman, Assistant Coach Bobby Sand and Frank Lloyd, the Chair of the Department of Hygiene at CCNY. The charges against Holman were largely based on the Board's opinion that despite a searching investigation, he had deliberately concealed information regarding reported bribing attempts with players, and the changing of high school records of players so they would be eligible for admission to CCNY.⁷¹ The Board further believed that Holman either knew many of the corruptive influences of big-time basketball or else was so naive about matters involving his own job as to raise doubt regarding his fitness as a teacher. Lloyd resigned before any testimony was taken by a trial committee of the Board. Holman was dismissed by the Board effective April 2, 1954, the date on which his suspension without pay would end. The dismissal would be preempted if Holman elected to retire before April 2. Holman appealed the dismissal to the State Education Commission who reinstated him to the faculty with full back pay. In 1954, he began his thirty-third season as CCNY's Head Coach.⁷² Sand was reprimanded, fined and assigned to duties outside the Department of Hygiene.⁷³

In December, 1951 Streit sentenced the three Bradley players—Chianakas, Melchiorre and Mann. Again, the suspended sentences given to the players were not unexpected. However, as in the cases involving the CCNY and LIU players, Streit's castigation of Bradley's President David Owen was no less compelling than his diatribe during the previous sentencing. Noting that Owen accompanied the team to all of its away games, Streit blamed the President and Booster Club for "overemphasis" at Bradley. The Booster Club was cited for

68. *Wheeling (W. Va.) News-Register*, 20 November, 1951, 19.

69. "Report of the Committee on Intercollegiate Basketball to Board of Higher Education," 17 November, 1952, 18. "Scandals" Folder, CCNYA.

70. *New York Post*, 20 November, 1951, 1.

71. "Statement on the Cases of Professor Lloyd, Associate Professor Holman, Mr. Sand by President Buell G. Gallagher, The City College," 25 March, 1954, 7, "Scandals" Folder, CCNYA.

72. *New York Times*, 28 August, 1954, 54.

73. "Report and Recommendations by the Board of Higher Education of the City of New York in the matter of charges preferred against Nat Holman and Robert Sand," 19 February, 1954, 35. "Scandals" Folder, CCNYA.

openly giving money to players after games, paying for bogus jobs and creating an atmosphere at the University inimical to sound educational practices.⁷⁴

Judge Streit dispensed his most serious condemnation of “money-mad athletics” at the sentencing of Beard, Groza and Barnstable in April, 1952. The 63-page report totaling 15,000 words cited a litany of abuses in the University of Kentucky’s football and basketball programs including covert subsidization of players, ruthless exploitation of players, cribbing at examinations, illegal recruiting, a reckless disregard for players’ physical welfare, matriculation of unqualified students, demoralization of athletes by the coach, alumni and townspeople and the most flagrant abuse of the athletic scholarship.⁷⁵ The athletic program “with a budget exceeding that of a professional franchise” was labeled by Streit as “a highly systematized, professionalized and commercialized enterprise.”⁷⁶ Particularly astonishing was the revelation from players’ testimony that on several occasions, Rupp showed the team betting slips which indicated the number of points by which Kentucky was favored. They also reported he had called Ed Curd, a leading Lexington bookmaker, for the point spread on several of Kentucky’s games. Furthermore, the players implicated Rupp as having more than a passing acquaintance with Curd whose bookie establishment was just five blocks from Alumni Gym.⁷⁷ Barnstable testified that after he missed a shot against St. Louis in the Sugar Bowl tournament, “Rupp came back and gave me the devil, and said the shot I missed cost his friend Burgess Carey \$500.” Carey was an avid gambler who loved to bet on anything and traveled with the team on a regular basis.⁷⁸

The Southeastern Conference and the NCAA agreed with Judge Streit regarding the abuses in Kentucky’s athletic program. In August, 1952 Kentucky was barred from conference and postseason tournaments for one year and the NCAA placed Kentucky on one year’s probation.⁷⁹ Rupp’s status with university officials did not significantly change after Judge Streit’s disdainful characterization of him “as a coach with an ear to the betting odds.”⁸⁰ University of Kentucky President H. C. Donovan wrote a letter to Rupp in May, 1952 pledging his support: “I want you to know that I shall not desert you in your hour of need. This is a good time for you to find out who are your real friends and who are your fair weather friends.”⁸¹ In Kentucky, the “Baron of the Blue Grass” was more powerful than Judge Streit.

The final tally of the 1951 scandal reflected a total of 35 active and ex-players accused of accepting \$50,000 to fix 86 games from 1947 to 1951. Sixteen players reported they had spurned bribe offers totaling \$22,900. Twenty of the

74. *The Sporting News*, 19 December, 1951, 1.

75. *Louisville-Courier Journal*, 30 April, 1952, 1.

76. *Ibid.*, 1.

77. “Indictments number 2818.51, 2819.51, 2820.51, Court of General Sessions, County of New York, People vs. Dale Barnstable, Ralph Beard, and Alex Groza,” 12 October, 1951, 21. “Basketball” Folder, UKA.

78. *Ibid.*, 22.

79. *Louisville-Courier Journal*, 5 November 1952, 1.

80. “Indictments Number 2818.51, 2819.51, and 2820.51,” 28. “Basketball” Folder, UKA.

81. President H. C. Donovan letter to Adolph Rupp, 6 May, 1952, “H. C. Donovan Papers” UKA.

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players and 14 men charged with bribing them were indicted and convicted.⁸² Law enforcement authorities believed the scandal was barely the tip of the iceberg—that more games were fixed than had been detected. In fact, newspaper writers believed that more games had been fixed between 1942 and 1946 than in the four years which followed. Editorial writers were now asserting that college basketball was in the same class as boxing, horse racing and politics. By American standards of morality, this was a compelling indictment.

The response of the seven involved institutions varied. The municipal colleges of New York City were banned from playing at the Garden while LIU trustees suspended the basketball program for six years, Kentucky, after a year of suspension, Toledo, Bradley, Manhattan and NYU resumed business as usual. In effect, their attempts at curbing the abuses in their basketball programs were perfunctory. Bradley and NYU would later be involved in the 1961 gambling scandal.

In 1954, three months after he had been reinstated as CCNY's Head Coach, Nat Holman spoke to a meeting of the New Jersey Sports Writers Association. He said "that gambling on collegiate basketball was more widespread than ever and some gambler somewhere is going to approach a player one of these days and we'll have a dirty mess on our hands."⁸³ As it turned out his words were prophetic. The 1961 scandal broke 10 years and one month to the very day after the 1951 scandal broke. After nearly two years of arrests, the tally revealed at least 50 players from 27 colleges had been fixing games in 22 states.⁸⁴ The fixing of games had not stopped and while the 1951 scandal tainted college basketball, the sport did not fail. It had become too successful a business and the commercialized aspects of the sport had become more sophisticated as profits soared to unparalleled heights. College administrators, coaches, and the NCAA had continued to promote and sanction the conditions which produced the 1951 scandal. And, ironically, it has not been the above groups which have prevented the gambling problem from becoming more widespread. Instead, it has been the gambling industry and players—the ones with the most to lose when college basketball is corrupted by gambling—who have kept the problem from spreading.

82. *Louisville-Courier Journal*, 10 February, 1952, 35.

83. *The Sporting News*, 24 January, 1954, 22.

84. *New York Times*, 25 May, 1963, 56.