

# The Tulane Scandal of 1985: Drugs, Gambling and Money

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On the night of March 26, 1985 New Orleans was rocked by revelations of a major basketball scandal at Tulane University. Star player John 'Hot Rod' Williams was arrested on sports bribery and conspiracy charges along with teammates David Dominique and Bobby Thompson, four other Tulane students and two outsiders. The arrests came after Clyde Eads and Jon Johnson, the first players to be involved in the point shaving conspiracy, gave prosecutors information in exchange for immunity from prosecution. The scandal centered on point shaving and dumping by the players in Tulane's games during the 1984-85 season when the team played Memphis State, Virginia Tech and Southern Mississippi. Point shaving involves winning by fewer points than the posted spread for a game while dumping is losing a game by more than the point spread.

This presentation examined the 1985 Tulane Scandal to demonstrate the way the commercialized aspects of college basketball have allowed the manipulation of players by the sinister influences of the gambling industry. Such an analysis revealed that the ground work for the scandal, like most striking events in history, was long prepared and virtually ignored by college administrators, coaches and the NCAA. The quest for profits has made college basketball at various points and time since the early 1930's one of the most corrupt sports in America.

Rumors of possible fixed games surfaced shortly after Tulane's loss to Memphis State. Tulane, a six-point underdog, held a four-point lead at half time, but eventually lost by 11 points. Plans apparently were made to fix the Virginia Tech game, but, since the game was not put on the board by bookies the game could not be manipulated. In the game against Southern Mississippi, Tulane was a nine-point favorite. They held as much as a 15-point lead but ultimately won the game by only one point. Evidence presented to prosecutors revealed the players were paid a total of \$19,500 for the two fixed games.

As testimony was given to a grand jury, allegations surfaced of NCAA violations and the use of drugs by the implicated players and students. Williams reportedly received \$10,000 cash "in a shoebox" from an unidentified Tulane assistant coach to sign with the Green Wave and was paid \$100 a week while in school by Coach Ned Fowler. Williams was the only Tulane defendant to go to trial in 1985. Less than a week after testimony began, Criminal District Court Judge Alvin V. Oser declared the case a mistrial, citing misconduct by the prosecutors. A second trial acquitted Williams of all charges. All other principals in the scandal pleaded guilty.

The Tulane scandal demonstrates that the commercialized conditions in college basketball which have produced previous gambling scandals continue to be promoted and sanctioned by college administrators, coaches and the NCAA. The decision to discontinue the basketball program at Tulane does little to address this problem. Indeed, as profits from the sport reach unparalleled heights, the potential for another gambling scandal increases as the sport has become a subject of absorbing interest to vast numbers of bookmakers and heavy gamblers.