



The Drumheller Eleven: Experiencing the Prairies

BIOGRAPHY

Jack Molinas and the College Basketball Scandals of 1951 and 1961

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In 1944, “Phog” Allen, the legendary University of Kansas Coach, warned of a coming scandal “that would stink to high heaven.” 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. 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.”

As it turned out, the words of Allen and Holman were prophetic. The final tally of the 1951 gambling scandal involved a total of 35 active and ex-players accused of accepting \$50,000 to fix 86 college games from 1947 to 1951. Sixteen players reported they had spurned bribe offers totalling \$22,900. Twenty of the players and 14 men charged with bribing them were indicted and convicted. 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.

The stories of 1951 and 1961 scandals have been recounted by other writers. These qualitative accounts have given us an understanding of the nature of the gambling problem in college basketball. However, these accounts have told us little about the fixers and members of other subcultures who were instrumentally involved in the scandals.

This paper examines the role of Jack Molinas in the 1951 and 1961 college gambling scandals. It addresses the following questions: 1) How did Jack Molinas “fix” games as a player and bribemaster? Molinas was the “mastermind” of the 1961 scandal and received a 10 to 15 year prison sentence. He had fixed games while playing at Columbia but was undetected in the 1951 scandal; 2) How did the supporting cast (i.e., players) and Jack Molinas conspire to “fix” games? Molinas used the New York schoolyards to meet young athletes to soften them for eventual fixing propositions. The dapper and affluent lawyer would often loan his car and money to players and take them out to dinner after a tournament; and 3) What was the working relationship between the subcultures surrounding college basketball (organized crime, gamblers) and Jack Molinas? Although law enforcement officials did not prosecute any member of the organized crime in the 1961 scandal, it widely believed that Molinas was loosely connected with gamblers who had underworld connections.

Finally, this research demonstrates the way college basketball remains a prime target for fixers like Jack Molinas and corruption from illegal gambling because of the growing clientele of illegal gamblers, moderate interference from the law enforcement authorities who are reluctant to aggressively prosecute illegal sports gambling, and high stakes revenues from a winning basketball program which makes money the prime motivation of college basketball players.