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Gambling Scandals in College Basketball: What Did Law Enforcement and Coaches Know?

This presentation examines the manner in which specific coaches such as Kentucky's Adolph Rupp, Fordy Anderson at Bradley, and CCNY's Nat Holman, in part, were instrumentally involved in the "Scandals of 1951." Evidence clearly reveals that the above coaches were acutely aware of the gambling in college basketball but decided to adopt a purblind attitude toward the problem because of various reasons described in this paper.

Rupp was reputed to have maintained close ties with Ed Curd, who operated a nationwide gambling ring above his Mayfair Bar which was five blocks from Kentucky's Alumni Gym. Several players also testified that Rupp strategically coached during games according to the point spread. Other coaches such as Anderson and Holman had observed the pernicious aspects of the gambling problem since each had observed their players receiving money from unknown individuals in locker rooms after games and had been alerted by law enforcement officials that fixing of games was commonplace in college basketball.

Other coaches such as Pete Newell of Michigan State and Kansas' legendary Phog Allen had observed the increasing penetration of illegal gambling into their sport

and as early as 1944 Allen had warned of a “coming scandal that would stink to hog heaven.” Despite its pervasive existence in college basketball during the 1940s and 1950s, coaches appeared to view the problem as minor and assumed a very reluctant posture in terms of actively promoting solutions to ameliorate it.

Law enforcement officials via wire taps, tips from bookies, and other investigative mechanisms were keenly aware of gambling and college basketball’s symbiotic relationship. Yet, for reasons which can only be labeled as speculative, it appeared that they were reluctant to develop a more aggressive strategy in terms of preventing the problem from spreading. This may have stemmed from their belief that individual institutions, the NCAA, and other college regulatory agencies would develop effective administrative procedures to prevent the situation from worsening.

One of the major results of allowing the problem to germinate is that today, more than ever, the “fixing of games” has probably been institutionalized because of organized crime’s major role in this activity. Unfortunately, recent investigations at Fresno State and Arizona State suggest that illegal gambling and college basketball have created a relationship which is virtually impossible to prevent as long as money is the driving force in this sport.