

GAMBLING

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Nick Englis and Henry Hill: College Basketball's Master Fixers

In the 1940 Warner Brothers movie *Knute Rockne—All-American*, Notre Dame's George Gipp makes a purported deathbed request to Rockne: "Win just one for the Gipper." Rockne uses this appeal during a locker room pep talk and helps to inspire his team to an upset victory against Army eight years later. Though historians have debunked the legend of George Gipp's deathbed request to Rockne, it is something in which the American public continues to believe.

To a large degree, college basketball has become the embodiment of the central elements of the Gipp/Rockne myth. It has wrapped itself in the American flag and strutted into American homes across the nation's television screens. Building on this illusion, college basketball has developed a love affair with fans throughout the country; these are confident that it is an institution unencumbered by corruption. However, one of the greatest threats to college basketball in America is also an institution, the institution of illegal and legal gambling that continually intrudes into the sport. Betting on sports is a major industry and a very real threat to the integrity of college basketball, yet law enforcement and college officials have remained largely purblind to it. Indeed, they appear almost powerless to prevent the fixing of games.

One reason for this may lie in the sophisticated and complex nature of illegal gambling, especially when it is controlled by organized crime. To ensure its investments, the underworld has constructed an elaborate mechanism that uses "fixers" or individuals who "soften" players for the purpose of ultimately recruiting them to manipulate games. This paper describes the manner in which fixers Nick Englis and Henry Hill were involved in two college basketball gambling scandals: the 1951 scandal and that involving Boston College in 1978-1979. The analysis reveals that the solicitation of players is an intricate process and that fixers such as Englis and Hill have rarely received appropriate attention from law enforcement or college officials. It also undermines the myth that fixing in college basketball has occurred in an unorganized fashion and involved only a few young players who have succumbed to the lure of easy money.

College basketball's survival is based largely upon its sophisticated public relations machinery that portrays the sport as 'pure.' Serious scholars of college sport often find it difficult to present an objective analysis of problems endemic in basketball because of the sport media's substantial influence on the public. But recent investigations of "point shaving" at Arizona State University and Fresno State University are potent reminders that this practice is much more serious and complex than the media and other sources indicate. This paper

may serve to reveal information that has either often been repressed or not investigated further, and especially to disclose the “softening process” necessary in recruiting players to fix games, a process that is otherwise difficult to detect and has received scant attention from local, state, and federal governments.