CLIENT ALERTS & INSIGHTS

“Point-Shaving” Scandal Rocks NCAA Men’s Basketball – Federal Indictment Exposes Widening Risk of Game Fixing in College and Professional Basketball

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Authors: Marisa T. Darden, Robert J. Kolansky, Bianca Smith

Featured Practices: Litigation, White Collar, Government Investigations & Regulatory Compliance

Featured Industries: Sports & Entertainment

Key Takeaways

- A major federal indictment has charged 26 individuals, including former NCAA Division I basketball players, in an international point-shaving and betting scheme that targeted dozens of college and professional basketball games, exposing widespread risks of game fixing.
- This case highlights escalating legal and regulatory risks for athletes, schools and sports betting operators, with severe criminal penalties and increased scrutiny-especially around player-specific “prop bets”-as digital evidence makes prosecution easier.
- Athletic programs, institutions and industry stakeholders should strengthen compliance education, monitor digital communications and review betting-related policies to mitigate exposure as enforcement and regulatory oversight continue to intensify.

Federal prosecutors in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania charged 26 individuals, including more than a dozen former NCAA Division I basketball players, in what the U.S. Attorney for the District described as an “international criminal conspiracy” to fix college and professional basketball games. The charges stem from a sprawling point-shaving and betting scheme that allegedly spanned the Chinese Basketball Association and the NCAA, involving current and former players, alumni, trainers, coaches and professional in the sports betting industry.

The case underscores the accelerating legal and regulatory risks facing athletes, institutions, sportsbooks and professionals operating at the intersection of sports and legalized gambling.

What Allegedly Happened

According to the indictment, the tiered scheme relied on fixers who identified and recruited players to intentionally underperform during games in exchange for cash payments, ranging typically between $10,000 to $30,000 per game. Fixers then promoted “prop bets” aimed at specific player’s performance and encouraged large wagers against those players’ teams for the final win, generating millions of dollars in betting activity.

Prosecutors allege the scheme:

- Targeted more than 29 games;
- Involved over 39 players across at least 17 NCAA Division I programs;
- Expanded from overseas professional leagues into U.S. college basketball as recently as January 2025.

Federal authorities say the FBI’s investigation uncovered text messages, social media direct messages, FaceTime calls and travel arrangements, leaving a substantial digital trail.

The Criminal Exposure

The defendants face a range of federal charges, including:

- Bribery in sporting contests, carrying potential prison time and fines;
- Conspiracy to commit wire fraud, punishable by up to 20 years in prison;
- Multiple counts of wire fraud, based on the use of electronic communications to carry out the scheme;
- Aiding and abetting, which attaches criminal liability to anyone who knowingly participated in or furthered the conduct.

From an enforcement standpoint, this is not a speculative case. Federal investigators have alleged detailed communications, financial transfers and performance anomalies that prosecutors believe demonstrate intent and coordination.

Why This Case Matters Beyond Basketball

This prosecution arrives amid a dramatic expansion of legalized sports betting following the 2018 U.S. Supreme Court decision allowing states to regulate gambling. While public interest and revenue have surged, so have integrity risks.

Several broader implications stand out:

1. *Digital Evidence Lowers the Bar for Prosecution*: Modern betting schemes are increasingly easy to trace. Communications that once occurred informally now leave permanent, subpoena-ready records, from betting apps to social media platforms.

2. *Prop Bets Create Unique Vulnerabilities*: Player-specific wagers, particularly in college sports, create incentives that are difficult to police and easy to exploit. This case is already being cited as groundwork for stricter regulation or outright bans on collegiate prop betting. NCAA President Charlie Baker is a staunch opponent to prop betting and has called for states to make the gambling activity illegal.
3. *Enforcement Will Continue to Expand*: Federal authorities have made clear this case is not an endpoint. The scope, international reach and number of uncharged individuals referenced in the indictment suggest ongoing investigations across leagues, sports and jurisdictions.

Takeaways for Athletes, Institutions and Industry Stakeholders

- Intentional underperformance tied to betting activity carries severe criminal consequences, not just NCAA sanctions;
- Digital communications are often the strongest evidence in modern sports fraud cases;
- Compliance education and monitoring are no longer optional for collegiate programs and professional leagues;
- Regulatory scrutiny of collegiate betting is intensifying, particularly around prop bets.

This case represents a significant moment in the enforcement landscape surrounding sports gambling and competitive integrity. The message from federal authorities is clear: as betting expands, so will investigations, and prosecutions.

Benesch's White Collar, Government Investigations & Regulatory Compliance group stands ready to assist institutions seeking to navigate the ever-changing sports betting regulatory landscape. If you are interested in more information, please contact Marisa T. Darden at mdarden@beneschlaw.com.