

I'm Shocked, Shocked That There are Sports Gambling Scandals Here

By Steve Sternberg



Have you ever wondered why sports analysts on a TV show would be asked if they think a quarterback will get more than 233.5 yards passing this week? Or whether an NBA player will score more than 28.5 points tonight? Seems like strangely specific things to ask. They certainly have no informational or analytical value in and of themselves. Unless, of course, you realize that these are the over/under bets on whichever sportsbook gambling app the network or show is partnering with or being sponsored by.

Allowing people to bet on whether an individual player will perform over or under a specific point or yardage level in a single game is just asking for trouble, and makes it easier for bad actors to influence betting outcomes.

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The only people who should be surprised by the current NBA betting scandal are those who have never watched or listened to sports news or sports talk or sports preview shows on TV, radio, or podcasts since gambling became legal across most of the country.

So What's the Latest Scandal and Does it Extend Beyond the NBA?



NBA Miami Heat guard Terry Rozier and Portland Trailblazer coach (and former Hall of Fame caliber player) Chauncey Billips were recently arrested as part of an FBI investigation into mob-related illegal sports betting and rigged poker games. Rozier is accused of providing non-public information about specific players that would allow certain

gamblers to benefit. In some cases, according to the indictment, players pulled themselves from games to help gamblers win their prop bets (these types of bets are based on whether or not specific teams or individual players will reach certain performance levels, such as scoring a certain number of points in a given game).

Rozier is also accused of telling a friend that he would fake an injury and remove himself from a March 2023 game in the first quarter. His friend allegedly sold that information for \$100,000 to gamblers who wagered on the “under.” At the time, Rozier was on the Charlotte Hornets – he was traded to Miami in 2024.

While Billips is charged with helping rig poker games, and not directly implicated in the NBA betting scheme, some believe that he did in fact provide inside information to gamblers that a number of his players would miss a March 2023 game.

Both Rozier and Billips are on unpaid administrative leave until their cases are adjudicated. Both have maintained their innocence and plan on fighting the charges.



I'm not saying that this scandal goes beyond whatever has already been reported or that other players and sports are involved (all of which seem likely), but **if you want "fix" the outcome of a particular bet**, there's nothing easier than manipulating the under on individual players in a basketball game, hits, balls and strikes in a baseball game, or yards passing or rushing, in a football game – all prop bets available on any sportsbook.

It should also be noted that in June, Cleveland Guardians pitcher Luis Ortiz threw a pitch way outside in the dirt, and was suspended amid allegations he did it on purpose to benefit gamblers who bet on that pitch being outside the strike zone (a surge in bets around that pitch was reportedly picked up by a company that monitors betting patterns). I can't imagine who thought allowing people to bet on whether the next pitch is a ball or strike was a good idea.

The various league commissioners can talk about the integrity of the game until they're blue in the face, and that may make their top 5 list of concerns, but #1 is still making money.

Sportsbooks and Betting Apps are Everywhere

Several sports leagues have partnerships with one or more sportsbooks. Sports venues, individual teams, and a number of celebrities and former athletes have their own deals with various sportsbooks. Reportedly...



DraftKings is a sportsbook partner for Major League Baseball, NBA Basketball, NFL Football, the PGA Tour, and the UFC. It also has exclusive advertising rights and digital sponsorships across NBCUniversal's sports portfolio, including broadcasts for the NFL, NBA, the PGA Tour, and the FIFA World Cup on Telemundo, and is a sponsorship partner with Prime Video's *Thursday Night Football*. It reportedly has deals with Warner Bros. Discovery networks (like TBS and TNT) as well. DraftKings also has its own television network.



FanDuel partners with the CFL, Major League Baseball, NASCAR, NBA, NFL, NHL, the PGA Tour, the Premier Lacrosse League, WNBA, and the Women's Tennis Association. It also operates its own television and streaming service, FanDuel Sports Network. It has a deal with Amazon Prime Video as the odds provider for its NBA and WNBA games, and has sponsorship arrangements with digital sports outlets, like SB Nation and Yahoo Sports.

ESPN BET, of course, exclusively partners with ESPN, and all of its sports news, talk, and preview shows.



BetMGM partners with the LPGA, MLS, NASCAR, NHL, National Lacrosse League, and the PGA Tour. It also has deals with NBC Sports and MSG Networks.



Caesars Sportsbook partners with the NFL and NFL Network, and is the exclusive odds provider for CBS Sports.

There are several other sportsbooks, such as Fanatics, Bet365, and BetRivers, which have their own followings.

It's All Designed to Get Viewers to Bet



Many sports news, talk or preview shows have segments on props or parlay bets, that either their regular analysts or betting “experts” recommend. ESPN's SportsCenter seems to endlessly hawk ESPN Bets and the various prop bets available to wager on. The NFL

Network's *Gameday View* preview show, not only has its hosts pick the games, but also has a segment on each show picking over/under bets for teams and individual players. Even ESPN's *NFL Live* (the best in the business) has its analysts discuss and recommend ESPN Bet's over/under props. I haven't noticed *NBA Today* hosts doing so. And, of course, ESPN, YouTube, CBS Sports, Draft Kings, Fan Duel, and others have TV programming and podcasts specifically geared to betting.

The Integrity of the Game?



So when does the integrity of the game actually matter to the various sports leagues? When fan perception and potentially TV ratings and sponsors start to be negatively impacted (they're not there yet). Or, when they see a need to self-regulate to avoid government intervention (they may be there now). According to ESPN sports betting reporter David Purdum, two congressional committees, one each from the House and Senate, have sent letters to NBA Commissioner Adam Silver asking for a briefing on the league's policies toward gambling, how they approach gambling investigations, and to provide a complete list of all current NBA gambling investigations. They also want to know why Terry Rozier was allowed to play while being investigated for illegal gambling. The Senate letter ends by saying that these types of scandals can lead the public to believe that sports are rigged.

You might have expected a pause to promoting betting sites and under/over prop bets immediately following the reporting of the latest scandal, but no, after briefly reporting on the betting scheme, every sports show continued to discuss gambling and player props as if nothing had happened.

What Should the Leagues and Sportsbooks Do?



Well, once the genie is out of the bottle, it's hard to put it back. Sports leagues do not necessarily have control over most gambling sites, and if some eliminate these prop bets while others don't, the ones who do will lose a lot of the business. And no one wants large numbers of consumers turning to illegal gambling sources. But there are steps that can be taken to help minimize the likelihood that players or others will be able to easily influence betting outcomes.

Prop bets that are most vulnerable to manipulation should be eliminated.

- Disallow bets having anything to do with one pitch or one at bat in baseball, one pass or rushing attempt in football, or free throws, turnovers, or fouls in basketball, one putt in golf, etc. (whether pre-game or in-game propositions).
- Or, perhaps, individual prop bets should only be allowed as part of parlays (these are bets where you select two or more bets and all of them have to win for you to be paid – at elevated odds). This would make prop bets significantly more difficult to illegally manipulate.
- If a player is going to miss a game due to injury, teams should have to announce it at least three hours before game time. If a player is going to miss a game due to “load management,” teams should be required to announce it at least a day in advance. This is the only way to avoid a player being out becoming inside information.

- One problem with the NBA is they allow teams to delay designating a player as being out until right before game time. I stopped betting on daily fantasy NBA contests because too often one of the players I selected was out, and I had no idea he wasn't playing until the game started – he was listed as playing when I made the bet just a few hours earlier. And, of course, they don't refund your money when that happens. This also makes it easier for someone on the team to disseminate “inside” information.
- As I'm writing this, I just got a message on my phone from FanDuel saying that “your NBA prop bets are protected from first half exits.” A good starting point, but they should add if you bet the under for any specific player (in any sport), and they permanently leave the game for any reason, your bet is void and will be refunded.

I'm not sure what else can be done, but the various leagues and sportsbooks are likely having fairly intense discussions on how to proceed. Maintaining the integrity of sports is one of the few bipartisan issues, and it's not clear at this point whether the leagues or legal sportsbooks would welcome or oppose government regulation.