

Risks are high for student gamblers

By MICHAEL MCCARTHY
USA TODAY

The triple-murder was the worst crime before or since in the small town of Verona, Wis.

Furious over a \$15,000 sports-betting debt, Dane County prosecutors said Meng-Ju "Mark" Wu, a 19-year-old freshman at the University of Wisconsin, shot three young men to death on June 26, 2003. The victims included his 28-year-old bookie, Jason McGuigan.

Hours before his trial was to begin, on Jan. 17, 2005, Wu hung himself in county jail.

McGuigan was Wu's target, recalls Bernie Coughlin, police chief of Verona. The other victims — 17-year-old Dustin Wilson and 25-year-old Dan Swanson — were innocent bystanders who happened to be staying with McGuigan.

Wilson's death continues to devastate his family in Charles City, Iowa.

His brother David Snook, also 17, locked the door of his upstairs bedroom and hung himself in his closet on Nov. 19, 2005, says his mother, Sandi Snook. David was never the same, she says, after losing his older sibling and best friend.

Their sister, 16-year old Jennifer Snook, was taunted about David's suicide at high school. She attends an alternative school and hopes to graduate next year.

"My advice to kids about gambling is don't do it, don't think about it, don't even be around anybody who does it," Sandi, 41, says.

The obsessive interest in March Madness has created a "booming office pool phenomenon," notes Sports Illustrated magazine, with everyone from grandmothers to professional gamblers giddily betting on their favorite college basketball teams.

But some college students addicted to sports betting or online casino games are committing crimes nationwide to pay off gambling debts. Others, unable to face the guilt or consequences of gambling away their car or college tuition, are committing suicide.

The nightmare scenario for the NCAA is for one of the hundreds of student-athletes participating in the Division I men's and women's basketball tournaments to be caught shaving points or throwing games.

"If they lose money, and most do, what other options do they have?" asks Michael Franzese, a former mobster with the Colombo crime family in Brooklyn, who organized college point-shaving schemes during his 17 years on the street.

"They don't have much money. A lot of them don't have jobs because they're so wrapped up with sports and their school. They don't want to go to their parents and admit their problem. So they end up stealing, or do something worse, to make up money they owe."

Wu committed the triple-homicide, Coughlin says, shortly after his parents confronted him about his mounting losses with an online sports book. "It was too much for him, the embarrassment, the shame of losing the money."

Watch for signs

Compulsive gamblers are experts at denial, says Michael Franzese, the former New York Mafia prince turned anti-gambling crusader.

Franzese tells college kids to ask some simple questions to check if they have a problem. Are they:

- Missing classes because of gambling?
- Having trouble focusing in class because they're thinking about gambling?
- Buying books, or otherwise educating themselves, on becoming a more skillful bettor?
- Facing more debts than they can handle financially?

If yes, they should try to deal with the problem before it takes over their life, he says. "You can't say, 'I'll make up my losses this weekend, then stop.' Chances are you'll be deeper in debt. Get some help."

Most student gamblers are ashamed to admit their problem to their parents, Franzese says. So moms and dads should watch out for warning signs of gambling or sports betting addictions.

- Among them:
- Unexplained need for money.
- Sudden increase in credit card debt.
- Displays of unexplained wealth.
- Money and valuables missing from home.
- Sudden dip in grades. Poor attendance in class.
- Watching more TV sports. Calls to 900 numbers for sports results and betting lines. Becoming unduly emotional over sporting events.
- Depression and anxiety. Withdrawal from family, friends and other outside interests.

"Many parents unknowingly advocate gambling. They let their kids have poker parties in the basement," Franzese says. "It has to be on your radar screen."



MARY ANN CHASTAIN/The Associated Press

Two unidentified women walk during lunch Tuesday in downtown Columbia, S.C., as a car passes covered with pollen. Experts recommended allergy sufferers keep their outdoor activities to a minimum in the early morning, when pollen is at its worst.

Pollen coats Southern states in yellow sheen

Dry weather keeps pollen high, leaving many suffering from allergies

By MEG KINNARD
The Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — A yellow haze of pollen descended on the Southeast in the past week, coating cars and porch furniture and making people miserable in one of the worst allergy seasons in years.

Doctors are telling people with stuffed-up noses and itchy, watery eyes to spend more time indoors if they can.

"Everybody who walks through the door, you can see it in their faces," said Atlanta pharmacy owner Ira Katz, who is running low on medication during the first part of the month, before the pollen arrived.

"Unless we get some rain, people could be having symptoms for quite some time," said Dr. Stanley Fineman, at the Atlanta allergy clinic.

Relief might be days away. There is no rain in Atlanta's forecast for at least a week. Experts recommended allergy sufferers keep their outdoor activities to a minimum in the early morning, when pollen is at its

worst.

Dr. Lisa Hutto, an allergy specialist, said wearing a mask when doing yard work and changing clothes and showering right away after coming inside can also help. And though it may be tempting, Hutto said people should not hose off porches or cars.

"Washing the pollen off could cause it to become airborne, and you could have more exposure," she said. "Even if you hose off your porch or car, it's just going to come back."

Associated Press Writer Dorie Turner in Atlanta contributed to this report.



JOHN BAZEMORE/The Associated Press

A duck swims through a pollen-coated lake on Tuesday at Atlanta's Piedmont Park. A lack of rain is blamed for the high pollen count.

Atlanta has had only four rainy days this month. Most of the rain Columbia has gotten came during the first part of the month, before the pollen arrived.

Atlanta's pollen count hit 5,499 particles per cubic meter of air Monday, the highest so far this season and the fourth highest in the 12 years that the Atlanta Allergy and Asthma Clinic has been keeping records. In South Carolina, the pollen count hit 4,862, according to the Allergic Disease and Asthma Center in Greenville.

A reading of 120 is considered extremely high in the Southeast. A lack of rain is blamed for the high pollen count. Rain scrubs pollen from the air. The yellow dust — which is coming mostly from pine trees — is proving to be a gold mine for car washes, even though some are offering free repeat washes for cars that get covered again within 48 hours.

"Business has been good, very good," said Steve Bell, assistant manager of AI's Car Wash & Detail Shop in West Columbia. Waiters at restaurants with outdoor seating spend their time between meals wiping down the furniture.

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Judge dismisses torture lawsuit against Rumsfeld

By MATT APUZZO
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld cannot be tried on allegations of torture in overseas military prisons, a federal judge said Tuesday in a case he described as "lamentable."

U.S. District Judge Thomas F. Hogan threw out a lawsuit brought on behalf of nine former prisoners in Iraq and Afghanistan. He said Rumsfeld cannot be held personally responsible for actions taken in connection with his government job.

The lawsuit contends the prisoners were beaten, suspended upside down from the ceiling by chains, urinated on, shocked, sexually humiliated, burned, locked inside boxes and subjected to mock executions.

Lawyers for the American Civil Liberties Union and Human Rights First had argued that Rumsfeld and top military officials disregarded warnings about the abuse and authorized the use of illegal interrogation tactics that violated the constitutional and human rights of prisoners.

"This is a lamentable case," Hogan began his 58-page opinion.

No matter how appealing it might seem to use the courts to correct allegations of severe abuses of power, Hogan wrote, government officials are immune from such lawsuits. Additionally, foreigners held overseas are not normally afforded U.S. constitutional rights.

"Despite the horrifying torture allegations," Hogan said, he could find no case law supporting the lawsuit, which he previously had described as unprecedented.

Allowing the case to go forward, Hogan said in December, might subject government officials to all sorts of political lawsuits. Even Osama bin Laden could sue, Hogan said, claiming two American presidents threatened to have him murdered.

"There is no getting around the fact that authorizing monetary damages remedies against military officials engaged in an active war would invite enemies to use our own federal courts to obstruct the Armed Forces' ability to act decisively and without hesitation," Hogan wrote Tuesday.

Had the Rumsfeld lawsuit been allowed to go forward, attorneys for the ACLU might have been able to force the Pentagon to disclose what officials knew about abuses at prisons such as Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and what was done to stop it.

Elvis' Army duds back for Hard Rock opening

The Associated Press

BILOXI, Miss. — The Army uniform worn by Elvis Presley, which was found in the Mississippi Sound after Hurricane Katrina, will be on display when the Hard Rock Biloxi opens in July.

The uniform is among dozens of items strewn across the Mississippi coast after Katrina struck in August 2005.

B.B. King's original guitar "Lucille" will return along with the guitars of Johnny Cash and KISS, said Joe Billhimer, the casino's chief executive officer.

Some of the rock 'n' roll artifacts will be in pristine condition, but others will be part of a Katrina memorial collage. Everything else will be new and gleaming inside the casino resort, including a display in honor of James Brown.

"It's a big deal for us to get back open, but we do think it's also a big deal for people on the coast to see it back open," said Billhimer. "It keeps revitalization going. It shows that we and a lot of others believe in the revitalization of the Coast."

The Hard Rock was destroyed by Katrina two days before the casino was scheduled to open.

Bondholders who had financed the casino's construction did not want to release insurance proceeds so contractors could be paid.

Lawsuits were filed. New partners were brought in. The casino's parent company, Premier Entertainment, filed for bankruptcy to gain access to the insurance money.

Throughout all those hurdles and with the legal disputes still being played out, the casino kept rebuilding. It's an investment of \$120 million that will provide jobs for more than 1,300 people.

"At the end of the day, we didn't have a choice," Billhimer said. "We had to do what we had to do. There's a lot of other people on the coast in the same situation."

The casino will have 1,453 slots, 50 table games and six poker tables.



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