

TALKING POINTS

You Fix the Game, I Break Your Legs

By Pat Jordan
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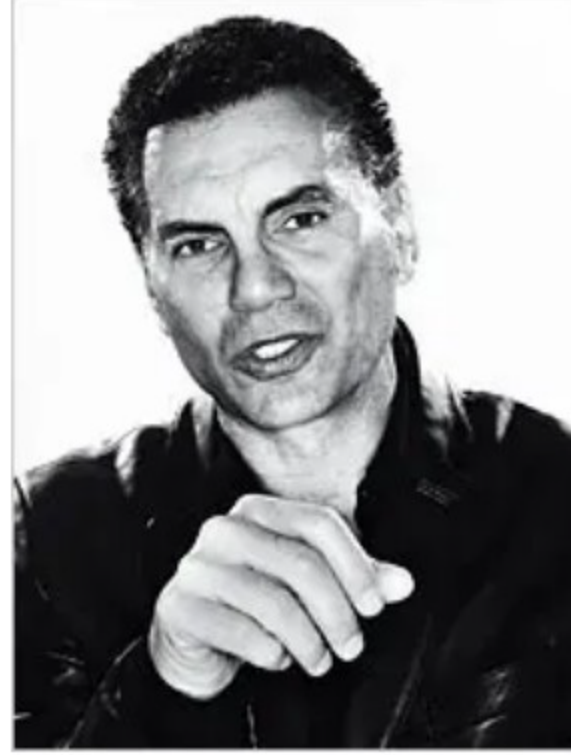
On Oct. 30, another N.B.A. season begins — and two weeks later, Tim Donaghy, the N.B.A. referee who pleaded guilty to conspiring with gamblers, will have his sentencing hearing. The league may have been shocked when news broke this summer that Donaghy passed inside information to bookies and bet on games he officiated, but Michael Franzese wasn't. In recent years Franzese, a former member of the Colombo crime family who spent seven years in prison, has been speaking to players in the N.B.A. — and other sports bodies like Major League Baseball, the N.F.L., the N.C.A.A. and the Association of Tennis Professionals — about the dangers of gambling. You can bet he's teaching them a lesson they can't refuse.

Did you ever fix a basketball game yourself? Let's just say I know it's been done.

How much fixing goes on in sports generally? It's isolated, but more prevalent than people think. In my day, you targeted kids with a gambling weakness. Today, kids get in trouble because there's more gambling available. Some of these athletes get in trouble with poker, and what happens? Somebody approaches them to shave points to help erase their poker debts.

To fix a college game, do you seduce the kids with wine and women, or do you form a relationship with them? You look for a kid already in trouble with a bookmaker, and he can't pay. So you tell him he's got three choices: bring the money tomorrow, help us out by shaving points — or else. Also, we know through the grapevine what players hang around bars. We schmooze with them, learn their background through research. We befriend them, tell them, "Listen, you're a senior, a pretty good basketball player, but you're not gonna be a lottery pick." Then you ask them how much money they got in their pocket. They're almost always broke. So you tell them, "The arena is filled every night, your school makes money off you and what do you have? Bad grades. You're not going to the pros, so why leave college broke? Use your head. We'll put some money in your pocket."

What about pro sports — how much fixing goes on there? There's not as much, unless you got a friend who's a pro, who'll do you a favor. Where pros get in trouble is they're not smart. They get to Vegas, get beat, hang with the wrong company, maybe you get them in a compromising position.



Rainer Hosch

Do you really go so far as to get a photo of a player in bed with a woman who's not his wife? Absolutely. If a guy's worth \$15 million a year and we get that picture, we tell him to help us out in the next game, or else.

What about fixing a game through a referee? You love to have a referee. One referee has a tremendous impact on a game.

How would you go about it? First, I'd tell the ref this had to be a long-term deal, attracting as little attention as possible. Now, some refs let guys play, and some bring guys to the foul line. The best way to fix a basketball game is for the ref to bring guys to the foul line.

There have been suspicions of match-fixing in tennis in recent years. Last summer, some unusual betting cast doubt on the world's No. 4 player, Nikolay Davydenko. Did you ever think anyone would fix a tennis match? Tennis is the best sport to fix because one guy controls the action. Besides, lower-seeded guys might make as little as five grand. And you tell them you'll give them 20 grand to throw a match. Basketball is the easiest team sport because you only have to get to one guy out of five. Baseball is the hardest because you've got nine guys. And even if you get to the pitcher, the manager can take him out early, so you have no guarantee. In basketball, a star plays the whole game even if he's playing bad.

Knowing what you know, are you still a sports fan? Big time. Baseball, basketball and football. I like college football because I speak to college kids a lot. But still, I'm always cynical about a game based on my experience. I'll see an obvious bad call, and I don't like what I'm seeing. [?][?][?]PAT JORDAN