

FORMER

FROM PAGE B1

in November.

According to the indictment unsealed Thursday, fixers started with two games in the Chinese Basketball Association in 2023 and, successful there, moved on to rigging NCAA games as recently as January 2025.

The fixers' scheme grew to involve more than 39 players on more than 17 different NCAA Division I men's basketball teams, who then rigged and attempted to rig more than 29 games, prosecutors said. They wagered millions of dollars, generating "substantial proceeds" for themselves, and paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to players in bribes, prosecutors said, with payments to players typically ranging from



Gary McCullough/AP photo

NCAA logo displayed on the fence before an NCAA softball game between Jacksonville and FGCU, March 24, 2024, in Jacksonville, Fla.

\$10,000 to \$30,000 per game.

Four of the players charged — Simeon Cottle, Carlos Hart, Oumar Koureissi and Camian Shell — played for their current teams in the last few days, although the allegations against them do not involve this season.

Calling it an "international

criminal conspiracy," U.S. Attorney David Metcalf told reporters in Philadelphia that this case represents a "significant corruption of the integrity of sports." The indictment suggests that many others — including unnamed players — had a role in the scheme but

weren't charged, and Metcalf said the investigation was continuing.

Of the defendants, 15 played basketball for Division I NCAA schools during 2024-25 season, prosecutors say. Five others last played in the NCAA in the 2023-24 season while another, former NBA player Antonio Blakeney, played in the Chinese Basketball Association in the 2022-23 season.

The remaining five defendants were described as "fixers" who recruited players and placed bets. They include two men who prosecutors say worked in the training and development of basketball players. Another was a trainer and former coach, one was a former NCAA player and two were described as gamblers, influencers and sports handicappers.

One fixer, reassuring another fixer, texted him

that there are no guarantees "in this world but death taxes and Chinese basketball," court papers said.

At the end of the Chinese Basketball Association's 2022-23 season, fixers put nearly \$200,000 in bribe payments and shared winnings from rigged games into Blakeney's storage locker in Florida, authorities said.

Players also helped fix games by recruiting other players, authorities said. In many instances, the defendants' wagers on the rigged games were successful. "The sportsbooks would not have paid out those wagers had they known that the defendants fixed those games," the indictment said.

The charges, filed in federal court in Philadelphia, include bribery, wire fraud and conspiracy.

One betting scandal after another has rocked the sports world, where gambling

revenue topped \$11 billion for the first three-quarters of last year, according to the American Gaming Association. That's up more than 13% from the prior year, the group said.

The indictment follows a series of NCAA investigations that led to at least 10 players receiving lifetime bans this year for bets that sometimes involved their own teams and their own performances. And the NCAA has said that at least 30 players have been investigated over gambling allegations. More than 30 people were also charged in last year's sprawling federal takedown of illegal gambling operations linked to professional basketball.

Levy reported from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Associated Press writer Maryclaire Dale in Philadelphia contributed.

MENDOZA

FROM PAGE B2

himself, and I think that's a good lesson for other student-athletes to see or the next generation around the country — that it's not all about you."

Still, it's hard to ignore the

results.

Mendoza leads the nation with 41 TD passes, a school record. He's the first Indiana player to win the Heisman and just the third quarterback to lead the Hoosiers to a Big Ten crown. He's now the favorite to be the first draft pick in April, and he finds himself squarely in the middle of perhaps the

most astounding two-year turnaround in sports history.

Yet here Mendoza stands, one win away from delivering the first 16-0 season in major college football since the 1890s, and all he wants to do is share the spotlight with everyone around him.

"It's been a great journey, I believe, for all of us," Mendoza

said. "I still remember when I was in the transfer portal, Coach Cignetti said, 'Hey, if you're going to come here, you're going to develop into a hell of a quarterback, and it wasn't about, at that point, hey, I'm going to promise you a national championship.' It was you're going to develop and have that belief."

Fixers later recruited college players to help ensure their teams failed to cover the spread either for the first half or an entire game, offering payments typically ranging from \$10,000 to \$30,000 per game.

COLLEGE GAMES THAT WERE IMPACTED

According to the indictment, the scheme eventually involved more than

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KEY

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HOW THIS SCHEME ALLEGEDLY WORKED

Prosecutors say players involved could manipulate a game, and therefore the bets related to it, by intentionally underperforming. Gamblers working with those players could then place wagers based on "higher degree of certainty" as to whether a team would cover

or fall short of the spread, according to the indictment.

For example, the indictment charges former college and NBA player Antonio Blakeney with taking payments from two high-stakes gamblers to underperform while in the Chinese Basketball Association during the 2022-23 season.

In one such game in March 2023, Blakeney scored roughly 21 points below his scoring average and his team lost by 31. That covered the spread for the favored opponent so fixers could win

most of their bets, according to the indictment.

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