

# **NCAA Division I Officials: Gambling with the Integrity of College Sports?**

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# Executive Summary

In light of recent gambling scandals in intercollegiate sports, new concerns have been raised regarding the involvement of game officials in gambling activities. Given that officials have perhaps the greatest potential to influence the outcome of sporting competitions, this study was undertaken in order to respond in more than an anecdotal or reactive way to concerns about college officials' gambling.

Data were collected from questionnaires mailed to 1462 Division I officials in the sports of football, and men's and women's basketball. Six hundred and forty officials returned completed questionnaires, a response rate of 43.8%. Notable findings include:

**1. The vast majority of Division I sports officials gamble.**

The research indicates that 84.4% of Division I sports officials in this sample have gambled.

**2. Division I sports officials engage in a variety of gambling activities.**

Sports officials were asked if they participated in any of 12 gambling activities since becoming a Division I official. The most popular gambling activities were casino gambling, playing numbers or lotteries, and playing slot or other gaming machines (all three by at least 50% of the sample). Over 45% of officials gambled on 3-5 activities; 15% gambled on 6-8 activities; and the remaining 1.6% reported gambling on either 9 or 10 of the activities listed.

**3. Division I sports officials bet on sports.**

In response to a single item assessing sports gambling, only 10.7% of respondents indicated that they bet on sports. However, when separate questions probed betting on individual professional and amateur sports, approximately 40% of officials indicated they had engaged in sports gambling.

**4. Division I sports officials engage in or know of activities that threaten the outcome of games.**

Fourteen officials, or 2.2%, admitted they bet on sports with a bookie. Two respondents stated that they had been approached about fixing a game. Twelve officials, nearly 2%, indicated that they were aware of other officials who did not call games fairly because of gambling reasons.

**5. A small percentage of Division I sports officials are problem and pathological gamblers.**

Responses to the South Oaks Gambling Screen indicate that 13 sports officials (2.4%) were problem gamblers and another 4 (0.8%) were pathological gamblers



# Introduction

The prevalence of gambling in the United States and the amount of money involved have increased sharply over the last three decades. It was estimated that approximately \$17 billion was legally gambled in 1974. In 1976, only 13 states had lotteries, two states had approved off-track betting, and casinos could be found only in Nevada (Cox et al., 1997). Today, with the exception of Utah and Hawaii, legal gambling of one kind or another is available in every state. Over 700 casinos operate in twenty-eight states and Americans now wager \$550 billion annually – an astonishing increase of more than 3000% since 1974 (Christiansen, 1996). Research consistently estimates that close to 80% of the U.S. population has gambled at some point in their lifetimes (Lesieur and Rosenthal, 1991; Hugick, 1989; NORC, 1999).



In terms of sports gambling, more than \$300 million was bet on sports online in 1998 through more than 280 online gambling sites. In 1999, about 2.5 million people were estimated to be playing National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) basketball tournament pools online with that figure expected to grow to 10 million by 2001 (Lowry, 1999). According to analysts with Nevada's Gaming Control Board, legal sports wagering reached \$2.3 billion in 1998. While difficult to pin down, estimates of illegal sports gambling in the United States range from \$80 billion to \$380 billion annually (NORC, 1999). The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) estimates that as much as \$2.5 billion is illegally bet on the NCAA Division I men's basketball tournament alone – in addition to the \$80 million wagered legally in Las Vegas (Harden, 1998).

More than just a matter of psychological interest and policy implications, gambling has recently drawn the attention of the public health community. Researchers speculate that today's adolescents and young adults who gamble at higher rates will become adults with a greater incidence of problem and pathological gambling (Shaffer et al., 1999).

While the fiscal, public policy, and health implications of gambling are clear, another set of concerns has been raised by the athletic community. A recent study conducted by The University of Michigan described the extent to which a random sample of college student-athletes participated in a variety of gambling activities (Cross and Vollano, 1999). The attention that accompanied release of those findings raised a new concern about the dangers of gambling: that game officials may have perhaps the greatest potential to influence the outcome of sporting competitions and, thus, may be the most vulnerable to the pressures of organized gambling interests. The study described here was undertaken in order to respond in more than an anecdotal or reactive way to concerns about college officials' gambling. This research study had two primary purposes: (1) to identify the types of gambling and other high risk behaviors in which sports officials have engaged; and (2) to determine the extent to which sports officials have engaged in these activities in the past 12 months.

# Review of the Literature

## Prevalence of Gambling Behavior

Shaffer et al. (1999) conducted a meta-analysis of 119 studies to estimate the prevalence of pathological and problem gambling in the United States and Canada. They found that, among the general adult population, 1.6% were level 3 lifetime gamblers (more commonly understood as pathological gamblers) and another 3.85% were level 2 lifetime (or problem) gamblers. The sample was then restricted to those studies that employed the South Oaks Gambling Screen (Lesieur and Blume, 1987), the instrument most commonly used to determine and diagnose pathological gambling using the DSM-IV diagnostic manual. Similar results were found: 1.71% level 3 lifetime gamblers and 3.41% level 2 lifetime gamblers. A national survey of gambling behavior in the U.S. population conducted by the National Opinion Research Center found that approximately 1.2% of adults are lifetime pathological gamblers and another 1.5% are lifetime problem gamblers (NORC, 1999). Smaller studies, such as one conducted on New York State residents (Volberg and Steadman, 1988), have found similar rates of pathological (1.4%) and problem (2.8%) gambling consistent with national samples.



Research suggests that there are significant gender differences in adult gambling behavior. Women engage in fewer types of gambling activities, most commonly bingo, while men participate in lotteries, casino gambling, and sports betting (Volberg and Banks, 1994; Kallick et al., 1979; Mark and Lesieur, 1992). Hraba and Lee (1996) found that women reported less gambling than men and that higher percentages of men engaged in nearly all types of gambling activities. Moreover, pathological gambling is twice as common in males as females (Sommers, 1988; Volberg and Steadman, 1988, 1989). Still, a recent Roper Center study suggested that the gender gap for gambling behavior has decreased to just a few percentage points (Volberg et al., 1999).

Age is also a significant predictor of gambling behavior. Data indicate that the highest rates of gambling scope and frequency are among adolescents and young adults (Shaffer et al., 1999).

# Chronology of Gambling and other Questionable Incidents Involving Sports Officials

Over the last decade or so, as many as one hundred sports officials representing different sports and countries around the world have been indicted for gambling, bookmaking, and tax fraud, and implicated in other compromising actions. These incidents and allegations have undermined the integrity of the sports and the reputation of officials who may control or influence outcomes. The increasing attention focused on sports gambling has prompted highly publicized responses from coaches, student and professional athletes, the NCAA, media commentators, and sports officials. The FBI and Internal Revenue Service (IRS) have conducted investigations into the affairs of sports officials which further revealed just how vulnerable a sports official may be to gambling schemes and organized crime. These findings raise several questions: How involved are sports officials in gambling activities? Do sports officials participate in efforts to affect the outcome of games? How much jurisdiction do regulatory organizations, including the NCAA, have over such behaviors?

Further, there are likely many more gambling incidents for every one that is publicized and documented. It may well be that only the most blatant scams and gambling activities are ever uncovered. What follows is a brief chronology of recent major, publicized incidents and recorded speculation involving sports officials:

## 1989: United States

Dan Moldea publishes his highly controversial book, “Interference: How Organized Crime Influences Professional Football.” In that book, he asserts and presents evidence that over 70 National Football League (NFL) games have been fixed. One of the allegations centers around two referees being paid \$100,000 by a New York City mafia figure to fix eight games.

## 1992: Chicago, Illinois

A Division I college basketball referee was arrested on bookmaking charges following a police raid of his apartment. An informant revealed two different occasions when bets were placed to someone at the referee’s phone number. Also confiscated from the apartment were what was believed to be a quantity of sports wagers and “slough sheets.” This official was later released and continues to officiate for several major collegiate conferences. (Chicago Sun-Times; Chicago, Illinois, March 11, 1999)

## Mid 1990s: Malaysia

Malaysian police arrested over 104 players, officials, referees, and bookmakers in a huge match-rigging scandal in the sport of soccer. There were rumors that amateur referees were going to partake in a huge scam before the start of the soccer tournament. (The Daily Telegraph, London, England, August 21, 1999)



## **June 1997: Europe**

Kurt Rothlisberger, a FIFA referee, is banned for life worldwide after attempting to fix the results of a 1996 Champions League soccer match between Grasshopper of Zurich and Auxerre of France. Since then, soccer officials have reviewed several other questionable calls and situations involving Rothlisberger. ([About.Com World Soccer](#), June 7, 1997)

## **June 1998: United States**

Several National Basketball Association (NBA) referees were found guilty of tax evasion following an investigation by the IRS. The sports officials were charged with trading in their first class plane tickets, provided by the NBA, for cheaper tickets and pocketing the money without reporting the extra income on their taxes. Many referees faced large fines from the IRS and a few resigned. ([The St. Petersburg Times](#), St. Petersburg, Florida, June 25, 1998)

## **December 1998: Indiana**

In an interview with ESPN television sports analyst Digger Phelps, Indiana University basketball coach Bobby Knight is quoted as saying, “The most susceptible guy in any gambling scheme is an official, without any question. I mean, if we only knew the truth about games that were controlled by officials having gambling interests, I think it would be amazing.” Officials were quick to defend themselves in light of Knight’s comments. ([The Indianapolis Star](#), Indianapolis, Indiana, January 9, 1999)

## **December 1998: Massachusetts**

New England Patriots Hall of Fame offensive lineman John Hannah suggested that the NFL influences officials’ calls on the field to help troubled club owners. He cites instances where the Patriots got favorable calls when they were considering a move to Hartford, Connecticut, and the Oakland Raiders got similar treatment when the owner threatened a move to Anaheim, California. He stopped short of saying referees were fixing games but added, “I’m throwing this out as food for thought.” ([Boston Herald](#), Boston, Massachusetts, December 1, 1998)

## **March 1999: United States**

Kevin Pendergast, former University of Notre Dame kicker convicted of sports bribery for his role in the Northwestern University point shaving scandal, is quoted as saying, “That was when I realized that one person – be it a coach, player, or referee – can control the outcome of the game. It is like spinning the roulette wheel.... You might as well put your money down and pick red or black.” ([St. Petersburg Times](#), St. Petersburg, Florida, March 26, 1999)

## **May 1999: Africa**

Two Tunisian Soccer Club representatives were arrested on allegations that they attempted to bribe match officials in an African Cup game. ([St. Petersburg Times](#), St. Petersburg, Florida, May 18, 1999)

## **August 1999: Croatia**

The Croatian Secret Service was found to have kept files on soccer referees in order to document any suspected instances of “racketeering and extortion.” However, it was determined that these files were kept not so much to clean up the game, but in order that the Secret Service could bribe the referees themselves. ([The Observer](#), August 15, 1999)

## **December 1999: Minnesota**

A high school hockey referee is charged with taking sports bets on college and professional games. The charges were filed after evidence of illegal bookmaking was discovered in a January 1999 investigation. Michael Heichert, the referee in question, also officiates hockey games in the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference. It is believed that Heichert took in about \$850,000 in wagers and had about 20-30 customers between August 1998 and January 1999. He was previously convicted in 1989 of taking over \$2 million in illegal bets on sports. (Star Tribune, Minneapolis, Minnesota, January 23, 1999)

## **January 2000: Italy**

Italian Serie A soccer referees were required to return expensive Rolex watches that were given secretly as Christmas gifts by the AC Roma club. Silver Rolex watches were given to 36 referees, while two top officials of the referees association received gold watches. Within days, it was learned that most of the clubs in Serie A and B had supplied referees with presents. In the wake of the mounting controversy, the referees were required to turn back all gifts. (Scotland on Sunday, Scotland, January 16, 2000)

## **March 2000: United States**

The NCAA will conduct background checks on 100 officials who will work the men's and women's postseason basketball tournaments. At the announcement, Jimmy Collins, the University of Illinois-Chicago basketball coach, is quoted as saying, "Referees can really determine the outcome of a game by making a call or not making a call. I'm not saying they are doing it. Why not check them? I've learned down through the years that strange things happen." (Chicago Sun-Times, Chicago, Illinois, March 11, 1999)

The literature review and above chronology provide a broader context into which the descriptive information from this sample of Division I sports officials can fit. This information will help determine if the rate at which sports officials gamble, the amounts of money involved, specific gambling activities, and incidence of problem and pathological gambling are consistent with those found in other surveys. The chronology of gambling incidents provides further anecdotal evidence of sports officials' engagement in questionable behavior.



# Methodology

Approval to use human subjects for this investigation was obtained from the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board. The specific research methods are described in the following sections.

## Setting for the Study

All NCAA Division I officials in the sports of football, men's basketball, and women's basketball were included in the study. Participants were from the following conferences: Atlantic Coast (ACC), Atlantic-10, Big 12, Big East, Big Ten, Big Sky, Big West, Colonial, Conference USA, Mid-American (MAC), Ohio Valley, Pac 10, Patriot League, Southeastern (SEC), Sun Belt, Trans American Athletic (TAAC), and Western Athletic (WAC). A total of 1462 college sports officials were included in the sample.

## Data Collection Procedures

Participants' names and addresses were obtained from media guides for the above-named conferences. Where addresses were not provided, information was obtained through public sources. A cover letter that described the purpose of the study, explained the confidentiality protections used, and offered information on how to contact the researchers with any questions was mailed to each participant. In addition, the packet included a self-administered questionnaire, pencil, and a stamped reply envelope addressed to the investigators. No payment or compensation was provided to respondents.

It is important to note that neither the survey, nor the return envelopes, were coded in any manner that would connect the respondents' answers with their identity. Identifying marks were omitted in order to increase the confidence of the respondents that the research was truly anonymous. Without these codes, it was not possible to send a second questionnaire to those individuals who did not respond to the first query. The final response rate is a product of this emphasis on confidentiality protections.



## Survey Instrument

A self-administered, written questionnaire was used to gather responses to closed-ended questions. The instrument was patterned after that used in an earlier study of gambling among college student-athletes (Cross and Vollano, 1999). It was developed using concepts and items taken from two previously published measures: The South Oaks Gambling Screen (Lesieur and Blume, 1987), and A Survey of American Gambling Attitudes and Behavior (Kallick et al., 1979). The current survey instrument incorporated the entire South Oaks Gambling Screen which screens for pathological gambling.

The questionnaire utilized in this study was divided into four sections: (I) general gambling activities; (II) sports-related gambling; (III) gambling with bookmakers and other organized gambling activities; and (IV) demographic and other general information about the respondent. Each of these sections will be described in turn.

Section I began with a series of questions about 12 specific gambling activities. Respondents were asked to indicate if they had engaged in the behavior since becoming a Division I sports official and the number of times they had engaged in the activity in the last 12 months. Among the gambling behaviors queried in this section were playing cards for money, betting on animals or sports, and gambling in casinos. Additional questions probed the largest amount of money gambled in a single day since becoming an official, experiences borrowing money, missing work or a game due to gambling, and reasons for gambling.

Section II investigated in greater detail respondents' gambling related to specific sports including college and professional football, baseball, and basketball.

Section III addressed betting with bookmakers. Respondents were asked if they ever bet on a sports card, with a bookie on anything other than a sports card, or on a game which they officiated. Other questions sought information related to whether they had received money for not officiating fairly, providing inside information, or officiated with their own interests in mind. A series of questions parallel to those in Section II asked about gambling on specific sports with a bookie.

Section IV included standard demographic questions about age, sex, race, income, and years spent as a Division I official. In addition, respondents were asked to give their opinion on whether the NCAA should sanction college officials who gamble and conduct background checks on officials selected to work in the postseason.

## Data Analysis

The primary purpose of this research was to provide descriptive information regarding Division I sports officials' gambling. Data analyses included frequency distributions and descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and ranges). Where appropriate, tests of difference were conducted to determine significant differences between male and female respondents.

# Results

## Description of the Sample

A total of 640 Division I college sports officials returned completed questionnaires from the original sample of 1462, a response rate of 43.8%. Table 1 describes the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample in detail. The mean age was 46.0 years (standard deviation=7.6 years) with a range from 25 to 64 years of age. The vast majority of respondents were male (86.7%) and white (79.8%). Respondents reported a wide range of years spent as a Division I sports official. While the median number of years spent as a Division I official was 6-10 years, just under 2% had been an official for less than one year and another 13.1% reported that they had officiated for more than 20 years. Thirty percent reported annual incomes less than \$50,000; another 20.6% indicated incomes of at least \$100,000. Respondents were almost evenly distributed in the sports of football (34.4%), men's basketball (31.4%), and women's basketball (28.4%). Ten percent reported that they also officiated in another sport; the majority of these were volleyball officials.



**Table 1**  
**Sociodemographic Characteristics**  
**of the Division I Sports Official Sample**

<b>Sociodemographic Characteristics</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Range</b>
<i>Age</i>	46.0	25 to 64
<i>Gender</i>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Male	555	86.7
Female	72	11.3
Unidentified	13	2.0
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>		
White/non-Hispanic	511	79.8
Black/African-American	60	9.4
Hispanic/Latino(a)	14	2.2
Asian/Pacific Islander	13	2.0
Native American	11	1.7
Other	8	1.3
Unidentified	23	3.6
<i>Years as Division I Official</i>		
Less than 1 year	10	1.6
1 - 5 years	178	27.8
6 - 10 years	156	24.4
11 - 15 years	107	16.7
16 - 20 years	86	13.4
More than 20 years	84	13.1
Unidentified	19	3.0
<i>Income</i>		
Up to \$14,999	59	9.2
\$15,000 - \$24,999	29	4.5
\$25,000 - \$49,999	104	16.3
\$50,000 - \$99,999	290	45.3
\$100,000 - \$249,999	112	17.5
\$250,000 +	20	3.1
Unidentified	26	4.1
<i>Sport Officiated*</i>		
Football	220	34.4
Men's Basketball	201	31.4
Women's Basketball	182	28.4
Other	64	10.0
Unidentified	19	3.0

\*Does not sum to 100% because respondents could be an official of more than one sport.

## General Gambling Activities

Respondents were asked to respond “yes” or “no” to the following question: “Since you became a Division I college official, have you participated in any of the following activities?” The 12 gambling activities queried were: playing dice games, such as craps or over and under; betting on horses, dogs, or other animals; betting on sports; playing cards for money; going to a casino; playing the numbers or lottery; playing bingo; playing slot or other gaming machines; playing games of skill such as bowling, pool, or golf for money; betting on the NCAA basketball tournament; picking Super Bowl squares for money; and gambling via the internet or world wide web.

Table 2 describes the extent to which college sports officials reported gambling on the twelve activities identified above. More than half of the respondents indicated gambling on three activities: at a casino (66.0%); numbers or lotteries (51.0%), and slot or other gaming machines (50.2%). Three other gambling activities were reported by at least 25% of respondents: Super Bowl squares; games of skill, such as golf or pool; and cards. Bingo and internet gambling were endorsed as activities by no more than about 5% of sports officials. In all, 84.4% of respondents had gambled on at least one of the 12 activities listed since becoming a Division I sports official.

**Table 2**  
**Number and Percentage of Respondents who Gambled**  
**on Various Activities Since Becoming a Division I Sports**  
**Official and Number of Events in Past 12 Months**

<b>Gambling Activity</b>	<b>Officials who Gambled</b>		<b>Number of Events in Past 12 Months</b>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent*</i>	<i>Mean (sd)</i>	<i>Range</i>
Went to a casino	420	66.0	2.1 (3.0)	0 - 30
Played the numbers or bet on lotteries	325	51.0	14.8 (35.2)	0 - 364
Played slot or other gaming machines	318	50.2	2.3 (4.3)	0 - 60
Picked Super Bowl squares	211	33.2	1.2 (1.1)	0 - 10
Bowling, pool, golf, or other skill game	196	30.8	19.6 (22.4)	0 - 105
Played cards for money	168	26.4	3.8 (6.6)	0 - 50
Bet on NCAA basketball tournament	138	21.6	1.1 (1.0)	0 - 10
Bet on horses, dogs, or other animals	114	17.9	1.7 (2.8)	0 - 20
Played dice games (e.g., craps)	109	17.1	2.0 (3.1)	0 - 25
Bet on sports	68	10.7	4.2 (5.1)	0 - 20
Played bingo	34	5.3	1.2 (2.2)	0 - 12
Gambled via internet or world wide web	4	0.6	0.3 (0.7)	0 - 2
<b>Summary Variable</b> (Indicates whether respondent gambled on <b>any</b> of the above activities since becoming a Division I sports official)	<b>540</b>	<b>84.4</b>		

\* Percentages are calculated by dividing number of respondents who indicated they gambled on a given activity by the total number of respondents for that question. Consequently, missing data for each item causes the denominators to differ slightly.

Table 2 also shows the range and mean number of times sports officials gambled on the 12 activities in the past twelve months. Officials who engaged in games of skill for money (such as bowling, pool, or golf) did so an average of close to 20 times in the last year. Those who played numbers or lotteries did so an average of almost 15 times over the past 12 months. Respondents reported gambling, on average, less than five times in the last year on each of the remaining ten activities.

What is not shown in Table 2 is the scope of gambling among this sample of Division I college officials. The data revealed that 15.3% of the sample did not gamble on any of the 12 activities since becoming a Division I sports official. While 22.0% reported gambling on just one or two of the activities, the remainder of the sample tried their hands at a variety of gaming options. Over 45% of officials reported gambling on between 3 and 5 of the activities; 15% gambled on 6-8 activities; and the remaining 1.6% reported gambling on either 9 or 10 of the 12 activities listed since becoming a college sports official.

An examination of the scope of gambling activities by gender is shown in Table 3. Men reported betting on games of skill (34.0%) and playing cards for money (27.7%) at significantly higher frequency than did women (7.0% and 14.1% respectively) ( $p < .01$ ). Men were also significantly more likely to report playing numbers or lotteries and dice games than were women ( $p < .05$ ).

**Table 3**  
**Gambling Activities Since Becoming a Division I Sports Official by Gender<sup>a</sup>**

<b>Gambling Activity</b>	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent<sup>b</sup></i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent<sup>b</sup></i>
Went to a casino	369	66.8	44	62.0
Played the numbers or bet on lotteries*	290	52.4	28	39.4
Played slot or other gaming machines	272	49.5	40	56.3
Picked Super Bowl squares	196	35.5	11	15.5
Bowling, pool, golf or other skill game**	188	34.0	5	7.0
Played cards for money**	153	27.7	10	14.1
Bet on NCAA basketball tournament	127	22.9	10	14.1
Bet on horses, dogs, or other animals	100	18.1	11	15.5
Played dice games (e.g., craps)*	100	18.1	6	8.5
Bet on sports	59	10.7	5	7.0
Played bingo	28	5.1	5	7.0
Gambled via internet or world wide web	4	0.6	0	0.0
<b>Summary Variable*</b> (Indicates whether respondent gambled on <b>any</b> of the above activities since becoming a Division I sports official)	<b>477</b>	<b>86.6</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>76.1</b>

<sup>a</sup> Rows (numbers and percentages) do not sum to totals provided in Table 2 due to missing data. Table 3 provides data only for those who indicated whether they gambled on each item and their gender.

<sup>b</sup> Figures indicate the percentage of either male or female respondents who indicated they have gambled on a given activity since becoming a Division I sports official.

\* Statistically significant differences by gender at the  $p < .05$  level

\*\* Statistically significant differences by gender at the  $p < .01$  level

## Financial Involvement in Gambling

The college sports officials in this study reported a range of responses when asked about the largest amount of money ever gambled in a single day. Table 4 displays their responses.

**Table 4**  
**Largest Amount Gambled in One Day**  
**Since Becoming a Division I Sports Official**

<b>Largest Amount Gambled</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
\$1 or less	35	6.5
More than \$1 up to \$20	205	37.9
More than \$20 up to \$50	110	20.3
More than \$50 up to \$100	111	20.5
More than \$100 up to \$500	67	12.4
More than \$500 up to \$1000	6	1.1
More than \$1000	7	1.3

The median reported amount gambled was in the range from \$20 to \$50 in a single day. While more than one-third reported that their largest bet fell between \$1 and \$20, close to 15% indicated they have gambled at least \$100 in a single day. Of these, small percentages have gambled between \$500 and \$1000 (1.1%) or more than \$1000 (1.3%) at a time.

Sports officials were asked two additional questions about their financial involvement in gambling. The first question required respondents to indicate their financial status related to their gambling activities on a five-point scale from “way down” to “way up.” Those who did not answer “even” to the first question were asked to quantify their answer using several broad categories of financial involvement. Table 5 displays these findings.

**Table 5**  
**Division I Sports Officials' Self-Assessment of Their Overall Financial**  
**Status as a Result of Their Gambling Activities**

<b>Amount</b>	<b>Way Up</b>	<b>Up</b>	<b>Even</b>	<b>Down</b>	<b>Way Down</b>
\$0 -- Even			295		
\$1 - \$50	2	14		59	7
\$51 - \$100	1	12		25	1
\$101 - \$200	2	10		18	0
\$201 - \$300	0	6		16	0
\$301 - \$500	0	5		14	0
\$501 - \$1000	0	5		5	0
\$1001 - \$5000	0	7		4	0
\$5001 - \$10,000	1	1		0	0
More than \$10,000	0	1		0	0
<b>Subtotals</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>295</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>8</b>

In all, 295 officials reported that they were “even” in terms of their gambling finances, 149 were either “down” or “way down,” and another 67 reported that their financial involvement in gambling activities resulted in them being “up” or “way up.” Table 5 also indicates that respondents’ assessment in dollars of what it means to be up or down is highly subjective, with a range of responses in each financial category.

Most college officials’ gambling was self-financed. In response to a series of questions probing loan sources, 96.4% of officials who gambled indicated that they had not borrowed money from any of 16 listed sources to pay for gambling debts. Only 19 sports officials (3.6% of gamblers who responded) indicated they had borrowed money, eleven from a single source and 8 from multiple sources. Officials who did need to borrow money did so in a variety of ways: credit cards (n=8 officials); household money (n=5); credit line with a bookie (n=3); banks or loan companies (n=2); stocks, bonds or securities (n=2); passed bad checks (n=2); friend or coworker (n=2); paycheck or bonus check (n=2); credit line with a casino (n=1); or sold personal or family property (n=1).

## **Gambling with Bookmakers and Organized Gambling Activities**

Several items in the questionnaire assessed sports officials involvement with bookmakers, organized gambling activities, and other behaviors that might jeopardize the outcome of games.

Thirty-five percent of the sports officials in this sample reported knowing where to place bets on a sporting event with a bookie. Using only responses from those who reported knowing how to reach bookies, the most frequently cited mechanisms were: at casinos (87.9%); by telephone (78.1%); at a bar or tavern (52.2%); or via the world wide web (45.1%).

Table 6 contrasts reported sports gambling in any way with rates of sports gambling with a bookie. Respondents were asked to indicate if they had gambled in any way and/or with a bookie on eleven different types of sporting events. In all, 258 officials, or 40.3% of the total sample, reported gambling on sports in some way since becoming a Division I sports official. In terms of overall sports gambling, officials most frequently reported gambling on professional football (24.4%); horse or dog racing (16.3%); and college basketball (13.9%). In contrast, sports gambling with bookies was far less prevalent. Only 14 respondents, or 2.2%, indicated that they had gambled on sports with a bookie, with the largest number engaged in betting on professional football.



**Table 6**  
**Sports Gambling In Any Way or With a Bookie Since Becoming a Division I Sports Official**

<b>Sports Gambling Activity</b>	<b>In Any Way</b>		<b>With a Bookie</b>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Professional baseball	23	3.6	3	0.5
College baseball	2	0.3	1	0.2
Professional football	156	24.4	12	1.9
College football	48	7.5	7	1.1
Professional basketball	20	3.1	3	0.5
College basketball	89	13.9	3	0.5
Hockey (professional or college)	2	0.3	0	0.0
Professional tennis or golf	11	1.7	0	0.0
Fights or wrestling	3	0.5	0	0.0
Horse or dog racing	104	16.3	2	0.3
Other	8	1.3	0	0.0
<b>Summary Variable</b> (Indicates whether respondent gambled on <b>any</b> of the above sports activities in any way or with a bookie since becoming a Division I sports official)	<b>258</b>	<b>40.3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2.2</b>

While not shown in Table 6, the 14 respondents who admitted to gambling with bookies provided some additional information regarding these activities. When asked on how many games or sporting events they would usually bet with bookies at a single time, respondents indicated a range from 0 to 6 games with a mean of 1.8. The typical amount bet on each game did not exceed \$100; the mean bet on a single game was \$42.86. Finally, when asked to think about all the different sporting events on which they bet with bookies over the past year, sports officials in this subset indicated that the typical monthly bet was as high as \$3000 with an average of \$317.69.

The last set of questions in this section probed activities or awareness of situations and events that could directly jeopardize the integrity or outcome of games. Table 7 displays these results.

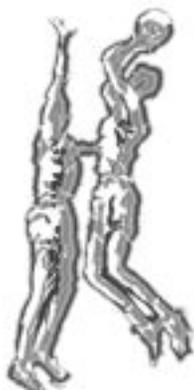


**Table 7**  
**Division I Sports Officials' Involvement in and**  
**Awareness of Activities that Threaten Outcomes**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Provided inside information	0	0.0
Bet on a game you officiated	0	0.0
Received money for not officiating fairly	0	0.0
Officiated with interests in mind	0	0.0
Approached about "fixing" a game	2	0.3
<b>Awareness</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Awareness of point spread of own officiated games	Not at all	71.3
	Slightly	21.6
	Moderately	5.1
	Mostly	1.6
	Fully	0.5
<b>Awareness</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Awareness of spread results in level of bias	2	0.3
Aware of officials who didn't call game fairly because of gambling-related reasons	12	1.9

None of the respondents in this sample indicated that they had provided inside information, bet on a game they officiated, received money for not officiating fairly, or officiated with their own interests in mind. Two respondents did report that they had been approached by someone about “fixing” a contest they were going to officiate.

In addition, respondents were largely unaware of the point spreads of games they were to officiate. While 71.3% reported being completely unaware, an additional 21.6% stated that they were only slightly aware of the point spread. Less than 10% had a moderate or greater awareness of the spread. Still, two officials reported that their awareness of the point spread resulted in their officiating with a level of bias. Twelve respondents indicated that they knew of colleagues who had not called a game fairly because of gambling-related interests.



# Officials' Opinions Regarding NCAA Practices

Table 8 highlights officials' opinions regarding four current or proposed NCAA practices. Clear differences of opinion emerged. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed (92.7%) that there should be sanctions imposed on officials who gamble on sports they officiate. In contrast, far fewer respondents (38.6%) felt there should be sanctions for those who engaged in sports gambling in general. Sports officials in this sample were also divided on the matter of background checks on officials who work NCAA postseason or bowl games. More than half reported they agreed with criminal background checks, while only one-quarter indicated support for financial background checks.

**Table 8**  
**Division I Sports Officials' Opinion of Current or Proposed NCAA Practices**

<b>Current or Proposed NCAA Practice</b>	<b># Agree</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b># Disagree</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b># Don't Know</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Sanctions for officials who gamble on sports they officiate (n=631)*	585	92.7	16	2.5	30	4.8
Sanctions for officials who gamble on sports in general (n=629)	243	38.6	258	41.0	128	20.4
Criminal background check on officials who work NCAA post-season or bowl games (n=632)	324	51.3	215	34.0	93	14.7
Financial background check on officials who work NCAA post-season or bowl games (n=629)	160	25.4	390	62.0	79	12.6

\* Differing response rates due to missing data.



# Problem and Pathological Gambling

Problem and pathological gambling was assessed using the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS), developed to measure the ten diagnostic criteria of pathological gambling contained in the American Psychiatric Association’s DSM-IV. A SOGS score of 5 or more is indicative of pathological gambling, while scores of 3 or 4 correspond to problem gambling.

Table 9 displays the SOGS scores for the 542 gamblers in the study who answered all of the necessary questions. The sample had a mean SOGS score of 0.35, with a standard deviation of 0.89. Close to 97% of respondents’ gambling behaviors did not reach the level of problem or pathological gambling. However, 13 sports officials (2.4%) in this sample were found to be problem gamblers according to the SOGS and another 4 sports officials (0.8%) were rated as pathological gamblers.

**Table 9**  
**Problem and Pathological Gambling Among**  
**Division I Sports Officials who Gamble (n=542)\***

<b>SOGS Score</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
0	427	78.8
1	75	13.8
2	23	4.2
3	8	1.5
4	5	0.9
5	3	0.6
10	1	0.2

\* Problem gambling indicated by a score of 3 or 4 on the South Oaks Gambling Screen; pathological gambling assessed by scores of 5 or more.



# Discussion and Implications

This report contains important findings related to the gambling practices of NCAA Division I sports officials:

**Scope:** Just over 84% of respondents surveyed reported gambling on at least one activity listed since becoming a Division I sports official. The three most commonly reported gambling activities were casino gambling, gambling on numbers or lotteries, and slot or other gaming machines. More than 60% reported gambling on at least three different activities since becoming a sports official.

**Frequency:** In an assessment of their gambling over the past year, sports officials most frequently gambled on games of skill and numbers or lotteries.

**Wagering:** The median amount of money gambled in a single day since becoming a Division I sports official was in the \$20-\$50 range. Close to 15% reported having gambled at least \$100 in a single day. The majority of respondents reported being “even” with respect to their gambling finances. Still, large numbers indicating being “down” or “way down” (reporting losses up to \$5000) and “up” or “way up” (with one respondent indicating wins of more than \$10,000). The amount of wagering with bookies seemed to be higher than that of general gambling. The typical monthly bet with a bookie ranged as high as \$3000 with an average of \$317.

**Sports:** While only 10.7% of the sample indicated that they bet on sports when asked to respond to a specific questionnaire item, approximately 40% answered affirmatively to related questions about gambling on individual sports. Fourteen officials admitted to gambling on sports with a bookie.

**Integrity:** Several items touched on activities or knowledge of activities that threaten the integrity of intercollegiate sports. Two respondents indicated that their awareness of the point spread resulted in their officiating with a level of bias. Two officials reported being approached by someone about fixing a game and 12 said they knew of colleagues who had not called a game fairly because of gambling reasons.

**Pathology:** Analysis of the SOGS revealed 13 problem gamblers and 4 pathological gamblers in this sample of NCAA Division I sports officials. That 3.2% of the total sample was identified as either a problem or pathological gambler is consistent with data from general population studies.



The findings contained in this report are troublesome for NCAA officials; student-athletes, athletic department staff and coaches at member institutions; and fans of intercollegiate athletics. These data revealed that close to 85% of sports officials in football and men's and women's basketball have engaged in gambling activities since becoming a Division I official. While relatively few officials in this study acknowledged gambling with a bookie, the concern among many in intercollegiate athletics is that any kind of gambling – particularly gambling debt – makes one more susceptible to the pressures of organized gambling interests. At present, there is no specific NCAA prohibition against officials' gambling of any kind, let alone on sports. In contrast, the major professional sports associations (football, baseball, basketball, hockey) have rules forbidding their officials from gambling on their respective sports.



Moreover, 3.2% of this sample was assessed as problem and pathological gamblers. Unwin et al. (2000) observed that pathological gambling addiction “requires that the [subject] gamble in a persistent and maladaptive manner that disrupts relationships and daily activities.” As a consequence, these sports officials may be particularly susceptible to lures and schemes offered by individual gamblers and organized gambling interests. The researchers involved in this study found that it was very easy to get personal information on Division I sports officials including name, address, and social security number. Certainly this information could be used to identify and solicit susceptible sports officials' participation in efforts to influence the outcome of intercollegiate contests.

Of particular concern is the fact that several officials in this study admitted to behaviors or knowledge of behaviors that could threaten the outcome of games. Two respondents indicated they had been approached about fixing a game. Twelve respondents were aware of other officials who didn't call games fairly because of gambling reasons. These figures are concerning enough, but may well reflect underreporting, given that some respondents may not have told the truth in response to these highly charged questions. The fact is that there are only three basketball officials on the court at any one time. There are no more than seven officials on a football field at one time. A single official making self-interested decisions could

have a dramatic impact on the outcome of games. Statistics from the NFL indicate that, for the 1999 regular season, 57 of the 195 total replay reviews (29.2%) were overturned (NFL, 2000). No one can assess whether these calls were innocent mistakes made in the course of a fast-paced game or deliberate attempts to influence the outcome. Whatever the case, there is no similar provision for instant replay in intercollegiate football and, thus, no chance to right erroneous calls on the field. In intercollegiate basketball, a mid-season rule change instituted in January 2000 allows for the limited use of video replay to determine if a last-second basket should have counted. There is no recourse, however, to address concerns about any other calls or no-call situations in the course of a game.

# Limitations

The most significant limitations in this study are sample size, composition, and the impact of socially desirable responses. While a response rate of close to 44% is quite good, a higher rate would certainly have improved the generalizability of the study's findings. Still, the response rate of this study was affected by the confidentiality protections offered to respondents, notably the omission of any identifying codes or marks that precluded a second mailing. The sensitive nature of the topic of gambling, particularly in light of proposed NCAA background checks and sanctions, necessitated the use of these protections at the expense of sample size.

The composition of the sample is a second limitation. The sample was intentionally limited to officials in the sports of football, men's basketball, and women's basketball. While these sports garner much of the attention shown intercollegiate athletics, they are not the only ones. Including officials from additional collegiate sports might have revealed different patterns by sport. Subsequent analyses will examine significant differences using the three sports included in this sample.

The third limitation is the extent to which respondents provided "socially desirable" answers as opposed to the ones that best described themselves and their situations. Without question, there has been increased attention focused on gambling in college sports. The NCAA has taken a zero tolerance stance to gambling by student-athletes, coaches, and athletic department staff. If anything, the impact of social desirability is to under-report rates of gambling and involvement in activities that threaten the outcome of games. Interest in providing the socially desirable answer might have made it easier for respondents to admit to knowing colleagues who have not officiated fairly for gambling reasons than to admit to one's own such behaviors. Moreover, one of the characteristics of pathological gambling is an attempt to conceal the extent of one's gambling activities. These data show high rates of gambling, incidence of problem and pathological gambling, and officials' involvement in and knowledge of illicit activities. One may wonder just how high the actual rates might be without the effects of social desirability.



# Conclusions

The National Gambling Impact Study Commission observed, "Sports wagering threatens the integrity of sports, it puts student athletes in a vulnerable position, it can serve as gateway behavior for adolescent gamblers, and it can devastate individuals and careers (NORC, 1999, p. 3-10). While the Commission focused its attention largely on the impact of gambling on student-athletes, the same conclusions can be drawn about college sports officials who succumb to the temptations of gambling. Their involvement in sports gambling threatens the integrity and outcome of games and, certainly, can have a devastating impact on their lives and careers.

As interest and financial investment in sports gambling grows, gamblers' desire to find an edge to ensure their success may grow as well. Today's professional athletes may be least susceptible to bribes because of their high salaries and lucrative endorsement contracts. That leaves college sports officials and student-athletes as perhaps the most likely targets of gambling interests seeking inside information or someone to fix a game. While the NCAA has adopted specific regulations prohibiting student-athletes, athletic department and conference staff, and NCAA national office staff from engaging in sports gambling, this prohibition against sports betting does not extend to college sports officials.

During the regular season, officials are contracted and supervised by individual conferences. There is no uniformity of practices to recruit and train officials, ensure their continuing competence, prohibit gambling, or screen for gambling problems. These decisions and standards are left to the individual conferences. At present, few if any Division I athletic conferences conduct background checks on referees or officials, a standard practice in professional sports. The NCAA has no control over officials until the postseason. This year, the NCAA will be conducting criminal background checks on a random selection of 100 out of the 192 officials working the men's and women's postseason basketball tournaments. Referees were required to sign a release form agreeing to the background checks that will investigate their employment and credit history, civil litigation, and motor vehicle registration records (Terry, 1999). One could make the observation that officials' actions and calls during the regular season and, as a consequence, teams' successes and failures in that span largely determine which teams will continue play in the postseason. The high rates of gambling and presence of problem and pathological gamblers among the officials in this sample may give conference and NCAA officials pause to think about the inadequacy of current practices.

The Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act is the regulatory document currently in existence that limits sports gambling activities. The Act prohibits sports betting in all states, except those activities grandfathered in the states of Nevada and Oregon. At the time of its passage, Sen. Bill Bradley (D-New Jersey) said: "Sports betting threatens the integrity of and public confidence in professional and amateur team sports, converting sports from wholesome athletic entertainment into a vehicle for gambling....Sports gambling raises people's suspicions about point-shaving and game-fixing....All of this puts undue pressure on players, coaches, and officials" (NORC, 1999, p. 3-9).

The results of the present study indicate that the vast majority of college officials in the sports of football, men's and women's basketball gamble. Smaller percentages of officials are problem and pathological gamblers. Respondents also admitted being approached about fixing games or knowing others who may have done so. These data suggest Division I college sports officials may already be feeling the pressure of their own or others' gambling interests. How long can intercollegiate athletics withstand this pressure?

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