

FBI arrests NBA coach and player in sprawling sports betting and gambling probe

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On Thursday, two days after the professional basketball regular season tipped off, the National Basketball Association (NBA) was hit by a sweeping federal investigation that led to the arrests of more than 30 individuals, including Portland Trail Blazers head coach Chauncey Billups, Miami Heat guard Terry Rozier, and former NBA player and assistant coach Damon Jones.

The arrests, announced by FBI Director Kash Patel, came in regard to an alleged collaboration between organized crime, professional athletes and the rapidly expanding gambling industry. The latter has become a ubiquitous, sinister fixture of American society, whose leading institutions are pervaded by corruption.

The dual indictments—dubbed “Operation Nothing But Bet” and “Operation Zhen Diagram”—uncovered two interconnected criminal enterprises. The first involved insider sports betting based on non-public information from NBA locker rooms, while the second centered on a Mafia-connected network of rigged high-stakes poker games stretching from Las Vegas to New York.

During an hour-long press briefing Thursday in Brooklyn at the US Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of New York, Patel was joined by US Attorney Joseph Nocella, Jr., senior federal prosecutors and law enforcement officials from the NYPD, Homeland Security Investigations and other agencies.

Patel described the scale of the fraud as “mind-boggling” and claimed the illegal schemes used insider information, such as a player’s injury status, to manipulate betting outcomes on at least seven NBA games. The FBI also indicated that investigations are ongoing, and the current indictments are “just the tip of the iceberg.”

The FBI director continued demagogically and empty,

To those who believe they can merge organized crime with American sports, know this—the era of impunity is over. Gambling will be kept within the bounds of the law going forward.

Nocella described the alleged criminal operation as “one of

the most audacious sports corruption schemes since online sports betting was legalized in the US.” The federal prosecutors claimed the schemes funneled millions of dollars through offshore accounts and cash networks tied to La Cosa Nostra families, including the Bonanno, Genovese and Gambino crime syndicates.

The arrests came mere hours after the season’s second day of games showcased the league’s rising stars. Fans awoke to headlines announcing the arrests of Billups and Rozier in New York and Miami, respectively. Federal agents raided multiple properties, including luxury residences and private poker venues, under warrants issued by the Eastern District of New York.

Rozier faces charges tied to using insider knowledge to enable fraudulent bets. Billups has been implicated in a long-running conspiracy to stage rigged poker tournaments where outcomes were manipulated by organized crime associates and electronic cheating devices. Jones was charged in both operations, accused of serving as a recruiter connecting the sports betting ring with underground poker groups.

Altogether, the indictments list 34 defendants facing counts of wire fraud, money laundering, illegal gambling and conspiracy. Some defendants, including figures known by nicknames such as “Spook,” “Vezino” and “Sugar,” were veterans of prior criminal enterprises connected to sports betting enforcement actions over the past decade.

Local and national law enforcement cooperated in organizing the raids. NYPD financial crimes units, along with agencies in Nevada, Florida and New Jersey, tracked cash transactions through casinos and online sportsbooks. Investigators uncovered overlapping networks in which Mafia families acted as enforcers, collecting debts from players and bookmakers.

In a brief official statement, the NBA said it was “deeply troubled by the allegations” and had immediately placed both Billups and Rozier on indefinite administrative leave pending legal proceedings. The league pledged full cooperation with federal investigators while stating its commitment to maintaining “the competitive integrity of basketball.”

Attorneys for both Rozier and Billups denied any wrongdoing. A spokesperson for Rozier stated: “Terry has cooperated fully with authorities and maintains that he never

shared or exploited confidential information for betting purposes.” Billups’s legal team described the charges as “an extreme overreach” and suggested the coach had been “roped into card games without knowledge of any illicit rigging.” Jones’s representatives similarly insisted on his innocence, calling the joint investigation “sensationalized” and “politically motivated.”

The arrests also ignited commentary across sports media, including the comments of ESPN’s Stephen A. Smith, who suggested that the arrests may serve a political purpose under the Trump administration. “He’s coming,” Smith said on ESPN’s *First Take*. “Anybody who’s paying attention knows this is bigger than basketball. It’s revenge—a warning to the sports world that’s been critical of him.”

Smith framed the probe as “a nugget of evidence” showing Trump’s hostility toward players and leagues that had supported protests, particularly over racial injustice. “Don’t think for a second this came out of nowhere,” Smith remarked. “They didn’t just wake up and arrest a coach and a player the day after the season starts. Timing is everything.”

In a Fox News interview later in the evening, Patel called Smith’s claims “the single dumbest thing I’ve ever heard out of anyone in modern history.” He stressed that the arrests had been “the culmination of years of investigation by the Department of Justice and the FBI—completely independent of political interference.” Patel added, “We apprehend individuals for criminal activities, period.”

Whatever the motivations of the FBI, the scandal has highlighted an aspect of life in America that is part of the decay and degeneration of society under capitalism. Since the Supreme Court’s 2018 decision allowing states to regulate sports betting, the gambling industry has exploded into a \$150 billion market encompassing online apps, casino partnerships and state lotteries.

Virtually every major sports league now profits directly from gambling sponsorships; television broadcasts feature betting odds, parlay promotions and fantasy plays alongside game coverage.

Far from a harmless pastime, sports betting and the big money associated with it have spread their corrosive influence far and wide.

Millions of Americans, struggling under stagnant wages and rising costs, have turned to betting, looking for a fleeting hope of escape. State governments, facing constant budget crises, eagerly expand casino licenses and lottery programs designed to extract wealth from the most desperate layers of society. Gambling functions as a special kind of “tax” extracted mostly from those who can least afford it.

The working class, lured by promises of sudden riches, faces ruin: lives destroyed by gambling addiction and communities hollowed out by organized fraud and state-sanctioned lotteries.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has long warned, this trend signals the transformation of the United States into a “Casino

Nation,” where predatory financial speculation permeates every level of society. From Wall Street to Las Vegas, the betting ethos—on stocks, commodities, derivatives, credit default swaps or ball games—expresses the ruthlessness and filth at the top of capitalist society personified by Donald Trump.

The embrace of legalized gambling is intertwined with decades of financial deregulation and fleecing of the government treasury in repeated corporate and bank bailouts. Once considered underworld rackets, modern gambling empires now operate with government sponsorship. Casinos and sportsbooks are major sources of corporate income, while online betting platforms like FanDuel and DraftKings announce record quarterly profits. The same dynamic that once tied mob bosses to poker tables now links corporate boards, political donors and media conglomerates.

Trump, who as a “businessman” championed the casino industry, incarnates this nexus of gambling, criminality and political power. His Atlantic City casinos were built on debt, tax incentives, theft of wages and broken contracts. Today, Trump and his investment buddies in the “financial sector” are profiting from the gambling businesses that emerged after the deregulation wave that his administration accelerated.

So, when FBI Director Patel claims that “gambling will be kept within the bounds of the law,” one is forced to suppress the urge to laugh out loud. Today, the Department of Justice and the FBI are operated by the imbecile swindler-in-chief, residing in the White House, or what is left of it.

Professional sports, like the NFL, is a center of money corruption with multibillion-dollar advertising and television contracts. “Collegiate sports” is now for all intents and purposes a business enterprise divorced from “higher education” with multimillion-dollar Name Image and Likeness (NIL) contracts now being signed with athletes coming out of high school.

Of course, the sweeping federal investigation makes no reference to these more fundamental causes of the corruption of professional sports and gambling. Nothing will be said about the official cheating of the public by “the house” that goes on every day and every location in the US where gambling takes place, whether at the casino, online or the corner store.



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