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Adolph Rupp, the Kentucky Wildcats, and the Basketball Scandal of 1951

by Humbert S. Nelli

On October 20, 1951, former University of Kentucky All-Americans Alex Groza and Ralph Beard were arrested in Chicago, where they were watching a game between the National Basketball Association (NBA) champion Rochester Royals and the Adolph Rupp-coached College All-Stars. Beard and Groza, who in 1951 were members and part-owners of the NBA Indianapolis Olympians, were charged with having fixed games while still college athletes. Later that night another former Wildcat teammate, Dale Barnstable, was arrested in Louisville on the same charge. Thus began the University of Kentucky's involvement in the sordid, fast-spreading college basketball scandals of 1951.

The existence of corruption in college basketball was first publicized in 1945, when five Brooklyn College players were expelled from school after admitting they had accepted bribes to lose a game. The extent of the point shaving and game fixing did not, however, become evident until 1951, when Manhattan College star Junius Kellogg reported to the New York district attorney's office that he had received an offer of one thousand dollars to control the point spread in a game. Although the scandal centered on

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The author wishes to note the appearance of two pertinent and significant newspaper investigations after the following article was accepted for publication and all editorial changes were made. One was a series of articles that appeared in the Lexington *Herald-Leader* in late October 1985 alleging recent abuses in the University of Kentucky basketball program. The other was a November 19, 1985, Washington *Post* article charging that, since 1978, the NCAA has issued no-interest mortgage loans to executive director Walter Byers and other top NCAA officials and that Byers holds a \$500,000 loan issued in 1981 at eight percent, less than half the prevailing prime rate. Byers received the loan from the United Missouri Bank of Kansas City, the only authorized repository of unlimited NCAA deposits.

Lexington Herald, October 22, 1951; Chicago Tribune, October 22, 1951.

New York-area teams and Madison Square Garden games, investigations disclosed the fact that between 1947 and 1950 fixers had tampered with at least eighty-six games in twenty-three cities and seventeen states. Authorities named thirty-three players as having participated in the fixes; there were rumors that many more were involved.²

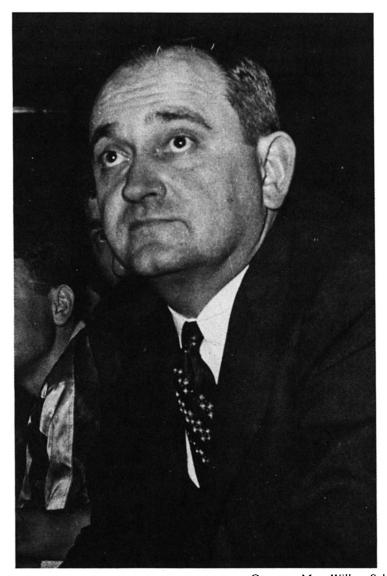
Unlike horse racing, which is bet on straight odds, in basketball games the weaker team is spotted a certain number of imaginary points. The result is called the point spread or "line." Thus if team "A" is favored to win a game by ten points, the bookie will quote a "line" of ten to twelve points, which means that if one bets on team "A," it must win by at least thirteen points — past the upper level of the line — for the person to collect winnings. If a person bets on team "B" to lose, that margin must be under ten — that is, below the lower level of the line. If, however, the victory margin is eleven points — the number between the upper and lower limits of the line — the bookie collects from all bettors. A fixer can rig a game in either of two ways: the winning team can go over the point spread or the losing team can go under the spread. Evidence uncovered by the New York district attorney's office showed that players, including those from the University of Kentucky (UK), were paid to fix games both ways.

As the revelations began to appear in the press, UK head coach Adolph Rupp (the so-called "Baron of the Blue Grass," the venerable "Man in the Brown Suit") made what turned out to be a very ill-advised statement. In an interview in Lincoln, Nebraska, on August 15, just two months before the scandal spread to the Kentucky Wildcats, Rupp maintained that "The gamblers couldn't get to our boys with a tenfoot pole." The team, he continued, was under "constant and absolutely complete supervision while on the road." Furthermore, the Baron bragged, "Nowhere was that supervision more complete than in New York."

But authorities in the Empire State soon demonstrated that

²See Charles Rosen, Scandals of '51: How the Gamblers Almost Killed College Basketball (New York, 1978).

³Russell Rice, Kentucky Basketball's Big Blue Machine (Huntsville, Ala., 1978), 217; Lexington Herald, October 21, 1951.



Courtesy Mrs. Wilbur Schuthe Baron of Basketball." Rupp

A mid-1940s photograph of Adolph Rupp, "the Baron of Basketball." Rupp was then on the threshold of his and UK's most successful seasons.

gamblers had indeed been able to "get to" some of UK's players, and with money rather than poles. The press, and New York sportswriters in particular, gleefully turned Rupp's words against

him. Larry Fox pointed out in his *Illustrated History of Basket-ball* that when "the scandal hit the family," Rupp no longer urged leniency for players who 'only' shaved points." In this unfolding drama Rupp did not perform admirably.

Ralph Beard and Alex Groza had been stars on probably the greatest team in Wildcat basketball history, the 1948 NCAA champions, the "Fabulous Five." In the fall of 1951, however, Beard, Groza, and former substitute forward Dale Barnstable were taken into custody and subsequently admitted sharing two thousand dollars in bribe money to shave points in a 1949 National Invitational Tournament (NIT) game against Loyola of Chicago. The Wildcats were ten-point favorites going into the game, but suffered a stunning 67-56 defeat and elimination in the opening round of the tournament. Soon Jim Line, a star of the 1950 team, Walt Hirsch, team captain and star forward in 1951, and center Bill Spivey, college basketball's player of the year in 1951, were implicated. All but Spivey admitted accepting money and received suspended sentences when they came to trial. Spivey, who adamantly proclaimed his innocence, was indicted for perjury but was released because of a hung jury.5

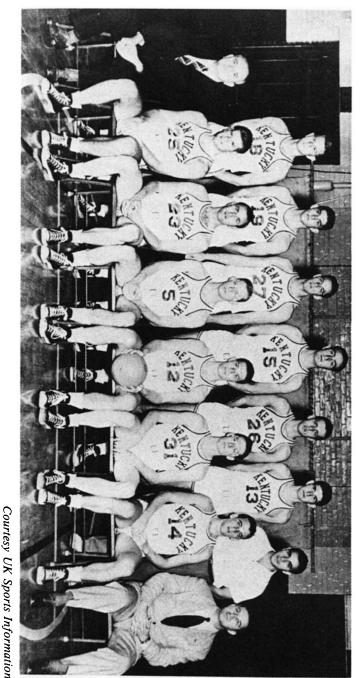
Beard, Groza, and Barnstable appeared before Judge Saul S. Streit of the Court of General Sessions in New York on April 29, 1952, to hear their sentences. As with the athletes of other universities who appeared before him and admitted their guilt, Judge Streit was relatively lenient. The judge was not so understanding in his dealings with gamblers, universities, coaches, and alumni. Nick Englisis, a former UK football player, his brother Tony, and Saul Feinberg were responsible for pulling the Wildcat players into the game-fixing scheme. When they came before Judge Streit for sentencing, Nick and Feinberg received three-year prison sentences and Tony a six-month term.⁶

In Judge Streit's opinion, not only were the gamblers and point-shaving athletes to blame for this blot on the integrity of amateur athletics, but at least equally responsible were "college administrations, coaches and alumni." All of them, Judge Streit intoned, "participate in this evil system of commercialization and

⁴Larry Fox, Illustrated History of Basketball (New York, 1974), 106.

⁵Lexington Herald, October 27, 1951.

⁶New York Times, July 3, 1952; Louisville Courier-Journal, July 3, 1952.



Joe Hall, Garland Townes, and Harry Lancaster (assistant coach). Day, and Humzey Yessin (manager); (front row, 1. to r.) Adolph Rupp, Jim Line, Cliff Barker, John Stough, Ralph Beard, The 1948/49 Kentucky squad. (back row, 1. to r.) Dale Barnstable, Walt Hirsch, Wah Wah Jones, Alex Groza, Bob Henne, Roger overemphasis."7

As the most successful basketball program in the nation, the University of Kentucky came under particularly close scrutiny and, in Judge Streit's opinion, was found wanting. The judge, in a sixty-seven-page opinion delivered on April 29, 1952, found the university to be "the acme" of the commercialization and overemphasis he decried as a general malaise in intercollegiate athletics. The magistrate complained that "intercollegiate basketball and football at the University of Kentucky have become highly systematized, professionalized and commercialized." He also found "covert subsidization of players, ruthless exploitation of athletes, cribbing at examinations, 'illegal' recruiting, a reckless disregard for their physical welfare, matriculation of unqualified athletes by the coach, alumni and townspeople, and the most flagrant abuse of the 'athletic scholarship.' "The judge observed, among other things, that in 1951 Kentucky spent \$107,000 on its basketball program, a sum only \$25,000 less than the typical professional team spent in the same season.8

How did some of the most talented players on perhaps the greatest of Wildcat teams get involved with gamblers in a plan which, if exposed, would ruin their athletic careers and perhaps their lives? According to Judge Streit, most of the blame for the Wildcat players' succumbing to the line Englisis and his associates offered should be placed at the feet of their coach, Adolph Rupp. Rupp had, in Streit's view, "failed in his duty to observe the amateur rules, to build character and to protect the morals and health of his charges." After their experience with Rupp, he said, Beard, Groza, and other players were "ripe for plucking by the Fixers."

Why did the players accept money from the gamblers? As Ralph Beard recalled in an interview a few years ago, "Myself and others received sums of money at various times from alumni members for a good game. We felt that receiving money from

⁷Court of General Sessions, County of New York, *People v. Dale Barnstable, Ralph Beard, Alex Groza.* Indictment No. 2818-51, April 29, 1952 (hereinafter cited as Court of General Sessions, Indictment).

^{*}Ibid

^{&#}x27;Court of General Sessions, Indictment.



Courtesy UK Sports Information

Alumni Gym on the UK campus.

gamblers was no worse than receiving money from alumni members." In his study *The Scandals of '51*, Charles Rosen also commented on Rupp's use of monetary inducements to reward or punish players: "Rupp's boys regularly received cash from either Rupp himself, or from the 'Boosters.' The sums ranged from \$10 to \$50, depending on how well the players performed. On the rare occasion of a UK loss, the ballplayers were lucky to get anything to eat. Rupp always maintained that any winning coach 'has to blur the line' in getting athletes, motivating them, and keeping them in school."

Ralph Beard and Alex Groza were not the only All-Americans on the 1949 University of Kentucky team. Wallace "Wah Wah" Jones was a consensus second-team All-American that year. In addition, he was an All-Southeastern Conference selection for four straight years. Jones was clearly a major factor in the success of the Wildcat team. Why, then, did the gamblers not approach him with their point-shaving scheme? In the opin-

¹⁰Interview with Ralph Beard, October 13, 1978. All interviews cited herein were conducted by the author.

¹¹Rosen, Scandals of '51, 170.

ion of J. R. "Babe" Kimbrough, former Lexington *Herald* sports editor and president of the NBA Indianapolis Olympians, "Jones was never approched because people like Englisis were physically afraid of him. Jones was somewhat hot-tempered." A different perspective was offered by former Lexington sports writer Ed Ashford. The principal reason, according to Ashford, was that Jones came from a more financially secure background than did the players who took part in the point shaving. According to this theory, Jones had less need for the money gamblers could offer than did the other players.¹²

The theory that the players succumbed to temptation because of a background of deprivation or a pressing need for money is appealing. However, it ignores the willingness, even the eagerness, of alumni to satisfy any needs the players stated or even hinted at. Fictitious part-time jobs, clothing, and money were among the documented offerings which alumni showered on players. Thus A. D. "Ab" Kirwan, who investigated the scandal for the university, was unable to reach a conclusion as to why the young men became involved. "To blame the lure of money and of a high-pressured environment was too simplistic," Kirwan believed, "for most other boys had not succumbed to exactly the same conditions." "13

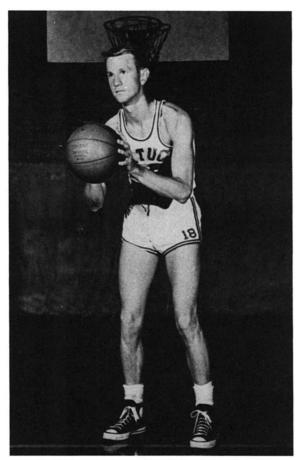
Shortly after the case broke in October 1951, Dale Barnstable explained the steps by which he and his fellow players fell into the gamblers' clutches: "There's a lot of smooth talk and the next thing you know you are in it deep. The thing about it is that you convince yourself you are doing no harm. You get fifteen or twenty dollars from the school for playing a good game and you figure it won't hurt if you take some bigger money for winning with something to spare." (The players, it should be noted, were at first induced to go *over* the point spread in exchange for cash payments.)¹⁴

The man who benefited from these flaws in the Rupp system — at least until his criminal indictment — was Nick Englisis. "Nick the Greek" had a unique opportunity to approach the

¹²Interviews with Ed Ashford, November 14, 1978, and J.R. Kimbrough, November 7, 1978.

¹³Frank Mathias, Albert D. Kirwan (Lexington, 1975), 39.

¹⁴Chicago Tribune, October 21, 1951.



Courtesy UK Sports Information

Dale Barnstable

basketball players because he already knew them. Englisis had arrived on the Lexington campus in 1944 on a football scholarship. He did not remain either on the team or in school for a full four years, but as a fellow athlete got to know members of the basketball team before he dropped out of school. In addition, one of his teammates on the 1945 football Wildcats was freshman running back Ralph Beard. A truly gifted athlete, Beard attempted to play baseball and football as well as basketball in college, but decided after suffering injuries to both his shoulders during his first season on the gridiron for UK to concentrate his attention during the remainder of his college career on baseball

and basketball.

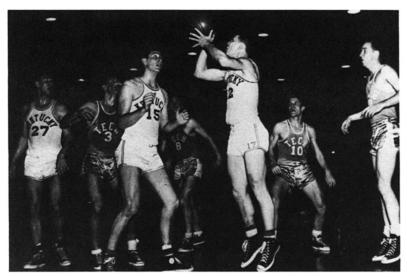
One point of dispute regarding UK's involvement in the scandal concerned exactly when Englisis and the players first discussed fixing games. "The Greek" claimed that it took place soon after the London Olympics. The American entry in the Olympics was chosen differently then than it is now. In 1948, the Olympic team consisted of five players from the UK team and five from the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) champion Phillips Oilers squad. Englisis later maintained that he met with Beard and Groza after the UK contingent returned to Lexington and listened to their complaints about not receiving any money from the trip to the Olympics. "The Greek" quoted Beard as saying, "It was lousy. They gave me a fancy blue cardigan jacket and white duck pants to wear — like I was a kid graduating from high school. They should have cut out that stuff and handed us some money. But I wound up with nothing but a free trip and a little Lord Fauntleroy suit." Groza then chimed in to complain of a lack of money, Englisis claimed. "Nick," Groza said, according to Englisis, "you're around New York a lot. You must know a guy someplace who can make some money for us. It's my last year here and my last chance to cash in on basketball. I'm serious."15

Groza and Beard disputed "the Greek's" statements. They maintained that participating in the Olympics was the greatest thrill of their playing careers. "As for the suit," Beard insisted, "it's one of my most prized possessions." Both players also claimed that they could not recall meeting with Englisis in Lexington. "The first time I saw Englisis after he left school," Beard stated after the scandal broke (or at least UK's involvement in the scandal), "was after the St. John's game in New York in December 1948 and he came up with his crew [Feinberg and Tony Englisis] and made his proposition about the '49 season." Englisis, for his part, disputed Beard's contention, arguing that he would never have gone to the hotel because Rupp would have recognized him and suspected that something was going on. "6"

Another point of disagreement was in the number of games involved. The New York district attorney's office maintained that

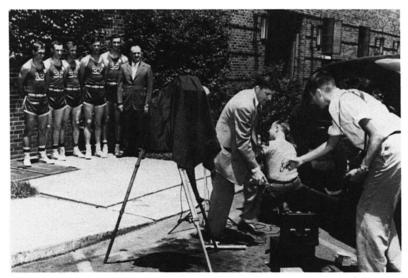
¹⁵Louisville Courier-Journal, February 16, 1952.

¹⁶Ibid. See also Ralph Beard's scrapbook of newspaper articles relating to the scandal (in his possession).



Courtesy UK Sports Information

Ralph Beard (12) shoots a jump shot against Georgia Tech in the 1948 SEC championship game which UK won 54-43. Wah Wah Jones (27) and Alex Groza (15) look on.



Courtesy UK Sports Information

Coach Rupp and the UK starters pose for photographers as the team prepares to leave for the 1948 Olympic Games in London. (I. to r.) Ralph Beard, Kenny Rollins, Cliff Barker, Wah Wah Jones, Alex Groza, and Adolph Rupp.

eleven games were fixed during the 1948/49 season, starting on December 18 with the St. John's game at Madison Square Garden, which UK won 57-30.¹⁷ Assistant District Attorney Vincent O'Conner, who headed the investigation, claimed that the arrangements for fixing the UK games were made in New York at the time of the St. John's contest, on December 18, 1948. This reconstruction of events would have helped establish a claim to jurisdiction for the New York DA's office over all of the games, regardless of where they were played. This effort was unsuccessful, and Beard, Groza, and Barnstable stood trial for fixing only the Loyola game, which was played at Madison Square Garden.

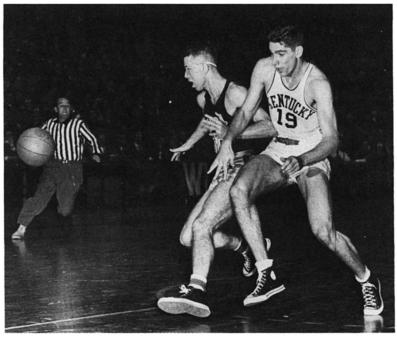
For their part, the players initially denied fixing *any* games. O'Conner travelled to Chicago to participate in the arrest and interrogation of the former UK stars on October 20, 1951. During seven hours of intensive grilling, the players at first denied everything: they had never taken money to shave points, nor had they conspired with gamblers to go over the point spread. Their defenses crumbled, however, and they confessed their guilt when O'Conner sprang his ace-in-the-hole: Nick "the Greek" Englisis.¹⁸

Beard, Groza, and Barnstable finally admitted to fixing three games: De Paul in Chicago, Tennessee in Lexington, and Loyola in New York. What were the wages of crime in 1948? For the January 22, 1949, De Paul game, each player allegedly received one hundred dollars. For the February 8 game against archrival Tennessee, the total amount paid the three players was five hundred dollars. The gamblers were more generous when it came to the Loyola game because, after all, it was a postseason tournament game. For that contest Beard and Barnstable each received five hundred dollars and Groza one thousand.¹⁹

¹⁷The other ten games were Tulane, December 29, 1948, in New Orleans. UK won 78-47; St. Louis, December 30, 1948, in New Orleans. UK lost 40-42; Bowling Green, January 11, 1949, in Cleveland. UK won 63-61; De Paul, January 22, 1949, in Chicago. UK won 56-45; Notre Dame, January 29, 1949, in Louisville. UK won 62-38; Vanderbilt, January 31, 1949, in Nashville. UK won 72-50; Bradley, February 5, 1949, in Owensboro. UK won 62-52; Tennessee, February 8, 1949, in Lexington. UK won 71-56; Xavier, February 25, 1949, in Cincinnati. UK won 51-40; and Loyola, March 14, 1949, in New York. UK lost 56-67. University of Kentucky Sports Information Office, Official Kentucky Basketball Facts, 1983-1984 (Lexington, 1983), 76.

¹⁸Beard scrapbook.

¹⁹Lexington Herald, October 23, 1951; New York Times, October 26, 1951.



Courtesy UK Sports Information

Forward and team captain Walt Hirsch (19) fights for a loose ball in a game played during Kentucky's first season in Memorial Coliseum (1950/51).

In response to the widespread claims that more games were involved, Beard responded in an interview with New York *Post* columnist Milt Gross: "I don't care what anybody says, there were only three games." Of the three, the only one over which New York authorities had jurisdiction was the Loyola game. Therefore, it was the only one for which the players stood trial. (In February 1952, it might be noted, Hirsch and Line were accused of shaving points in games played during the 1949/50 and 1950/51 seasons, but they were not forced to stand trial because none of the games they were accused of fixing was played in a state that had laws covering the offense.)²¹

Yet another point of disagreement in the UK phase of the

²⁰New York *Post*, October 23, 1951.

²¹Louisville *Courier-Journal*, February 20, 24, 1952. In 1952, the Kentucky General Assembly passed an act which prohibited the bribing of participants in athletic contests taking place within the state. See Kentucky *Acts* (1952), 1-2.

basketball scandal was the participation of Bill Spivey. Of the six Wildcat players accused of accepting money to influence the outcome of games in which they played, Spivey alone denied any involvement. Through hours of questioning by members of the New York district attorney's office, both in New York and in Lexington, as well as during a one-hour appearance on February 27, 1952, before a grand jury in New York investigating the scandal, Spivey stoutly maintained his "complete innocence." Assistant D.A. O'Conner obviously did not believe Spivey. According to John Y. Brown, Sr., one of Spivey's attorneys, O'Conner told the UK player on February 26, 1952, that Walt Hirsch, who had been Spivey's roommate and friend as well as his teammate on the 1951 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) championship team, "had implicated Spivey in 'doing business' in a Kentucky-St. Louis University Sugar Bowl game in December 1950."22

Another former teammate, Jim Line, also implicated Spivey. Testifying in a perjury case against Spivey in January 1953, Line claimed that "Spivey talked with Hirsch and me before practically every game played in December 1950 and January 1951 about the possibilities and arrangements for deals. Spivey and Hirsch were offered twenty-five hundred dollars to go under the points in two games played in the Sugar Bowl tournament in December 1950. We lost the first game to St. Louis, 43-42." The bookie, who allegedly had the fix in, complained to Line that "the game was so obviously fixed it was hard to get bookies to accept substantial bets on Kentucky games."

Another major element in the case against Spivey was reported by Dean of Students A. D. Kirwan (who was also faculty chairman of athletics) to a special meeting of the board of directors of the UK Athletics Association on March 2, 1952. Kirwan, who represented the university throughout the long months of inquiry by O'Conner into UK's involvement in the scandal, in November 1951 questioned each member of the current team "as to whether or not he had ever been approached by a fixer, or if he had any knowledge or suspicion that any team member had been approached." Kirwan reported to the Athletics Board at

²²Louisville Courier-Journal, February 28, 1952.

²³Quoted in Rosen, Scandals of '51, 187.

the March 2, 1952, meeting that "Spivey categorically denied that he had ever seen a fixer, that he had ever been approached by a fixer, or that he had any reason to suspect that any of his former teammates had ever been approached by a fixer." On November 30, 1951, Spivey went on record as follows: "I hereby state that I am in no way involved in any point fixing, bribery or the shaving of points in any basketball game. Nor have I been in the past with the University of Kentucky or anywhere else. And I have never been approached for this purpose."²⁴

New York authorities had established, however, that gambler Eli Kaye had approached Spivey during the summer of 1950, when the student was working at a Catskill Mountains resort. During questioning by New York authorities, Spivey admitted the encounter, but maintained that he told the gambler he was not interested. When Kirwan reminded Spivey of his November statement, the player "said he lied to me [at that time] because he was afraid he would be in trouble for not having reported the affair earlier and that by this time he knew that Hirsch, Line and Barnstable were in trouble and he didn't want to do anything to hurt them." Therefore, Spivey "did not report the incident to anyone, not even to Hirsch, Line, and Barnstable."²⁵

After considering Kirwan's report, the board issued a fivepage statement which proclaimed: "It is the unanimous opinion of this board that there is very substantial evidence tending to show that William Spivey was involved in a conspiracy to fix the Sugar Bowl basketball tournament in December 1950." The board voted to suspend Spivey permanently "from the athletics teams of the University of Kentucky."²⁶

In addition to losing his college eligibility in 1952, Spivey was barred for life by the NBA from playing professional basketball. On January 14, 1953, Spivey was brought to trial in New York on charges he falsely denied before a grand jury in February

²⁴"Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the University of Kentucky Athletics Association on Sunday, March 2, 1952," University Archives, University of Kentucky Library. Also see Lexington *Leader*, March 3, 1952, for a comprehensive article on the board meeting.

²⁵"Report to the Board of Directors of the University of Kentucky Athletics Association of Investigation of William Spivey's Complicity in the Basketball Scandals Made on February 26 and 27, 1952," Minutes of March 2, 1952, Meeting, manuscript copy, University of Kentucky Library.

²⁶Lexington Leader, March 3, 1952; Louisville Courier-Journal, March 3, 1952.

1952, that he discussed deals with a fixer to rig scores of games in which he played. Spivey was also charged with accepting a thousand dollars from gambler Jack (Zip) West to rig the score of the Sugar Bowl tournament game between Kentucky and St. Louis University. The indictment was dismissed after a trial jury deadlocked on the charges, voting 9-3 for acquittal. Assistant D.A. O'Conner, who headed the prosecution, acknowledged that the case against Spivey was severely weakened by the death on August 20, 1952, of Eli Kaye as well as the refusal of Jack West, the state's other key witness, to testify unless he was allowed to withdraw his guilty plea. The remaining witnesses, former team-



Courtesy UK Sports Information Bill Spivey, a Georgia native, became UK's first seven-foot player.

mates Walt Hirsch and Jim Line, reported the New York *Times*, "lacked credibility because of their own connection with the gamefixing" and also because of contradictory evidence they had earlier given before the grand jury.²⁷

With the dismissal, Spivey felt his name had been cleared, but apparently this was not to be. Lexington *Herald-Leader* sportswriter D.G. FitzMaurice, who interviewed Spivey in 1977, observed that, although the case was dropped, "the damage had been done." The former All-American expressed bitterness over his treatment by UK authorities. "Instead of treating me as one of the UK family," he told FitzMaurice, "they wanted to pacify the NCAA and the New York authorities because they knew they were guilty of paying players and illegal recruiting." FitzMaurice concluded that Spivey "still carries the mental scars of those days." ²⁸

If some of the Wildcat players became acquainted with gamblers, so apparently had their coach. Judge Streit decried Adolph Rupp's relationship with Lexington bookmaker Ed Curd. As UK Sports Information Director Russell Rice noted in his book Big Blue Machine (1978), Curd was "the undisputed 'king' of Lexington bookmakers at the time" as well as "a nationally known gambling figure who operated in comparative security above the Mayfair Bar on Lexington's Main Street. He was friendly with the 'right' persons, made his contributions to charity — Rupp had gone to Curd's home to solicit for the local children's hospital — and operated a 340-acre farm near Lexington. His name was mentioned at least twice in the Senate Crime Committee investigation as Lexington's betting commissioner."²⁹

Rupp certainly received enough warnings about Curd's notoriety. Even Rupp's college coach and mentor, Phog Allen of Kansas University, was fully aware of Curd's activities and prominence as a bookmaker. After a visit to Lexington in 1944, Russell Rice noted, Allen charged that the "headquarters of a

²⁷Louisville *Courier-Journal*, December 6, 1952; January 15-21, April 15, 1953; New York *Times*, May 16, 1953; "Remarks of Assistant District Attorney Vincent A.G. O'Connor in moving the Dismissal of the Perjury Indictment against William Spivey, April 15, 1953," manuscript copy, University of Kentucky Library.

²⁸Lexington Herald-Leader, September 4, 1977.

²⁹Rice, Big Blue Machine, 227.

nationwide gambling ring was a room above the Mayfair Bar, where a gigantic handbook each Saturday during the football season handled as much as \$500,000 on college games. Allen also charged," Rice continued, "that Lexington was probably the biggest high school and college gambling center in the country and that bookies from racetracks after World War II were moving into the intercollegiate field and the situation was bound to get worse." It would have been difficult for Rupp not to have been aware of Curd's notoriety because, as Rice noted, Curd's Mayfair Bar, the center of this activity, "was only about five blocks from Alumni Gym."³⁰

In testimony before Judge Streit, the Wildcat coach admitted knowing Curd (misspelled "Kurd" in the court records) and conceded it was "general knowledge" that Curd was a bookie and operated a bookmaking establishment in Lexington. Rupp further acknowledged that Curd had on at least two occasions joined the Baron and others of the Kentucky traveling contingent at meals in New York's Copacabana night club and had traveled on the train to at least one game with the team. However, the Baron denied the contention of some of his players that he frequently telephoned Curd to learn the point spread on UK games. Under questioning, Rupp did admit that he had called the Lexington bookmaker for this information, but claimed he had done so only once. The players also maintained (and the Baron denied) that Rupp coached according to the point spread, making substitutions and strategy decisions as the spread dictated.³¹

In response to Judge Streit's accusation that Rupp discussed point spreads with his teams and the implication that he may have been involved with gamblers, the University of Kentucky maintained in a formal statement that point spreads were "published in every metropolitan newspaper in the land for all who were interested to read. We can understand how Judge Streit, from his point of view, might read a sinister meaning into such an act. We can also appreciate that Coach Rupp and other coaches would use this information only to stir their teams to greater efforts." The university further stated, "While we certainly do not condone even a casual relationship between any University employee and

³⁰ Ibid

³¹Court of General Sessions, Indictment.

a professional gambler, it appears to us that Judge Streit has taken a rather accidental affair and given it an appearance of evil that is not warranted."³²

In an interview conducted in 1978, Ed Ashford, who had been Lexington *Herald* sports editor in 1951 when the scandal broke, also defended Rupp from Streit's accusations. "As far as I know," Ashford maintained, "Rupp was not a betting man. I don't think he even went to the horse races." A. B. "Happy" Chandler, for decades a Kentucky political power as well as a close personal friend of the Baron, also strongly endorsed Rupp's innocence. Chandler bluntly stated: "There's not a word of truth that Rupp was a betting man." As for Ed Curd's possible involvement in the scandal: "Ed Curd is not a crook. He's a professional gambler. He had nothing on earth to do with the fixing of basketball games."

Although Governor Lawrence W. Wetherby (who also served as a member of the UK Board of Trustees) was less emotional in his reaction to Judge Streit's critique of the Wildcat athletic program, he did, as historian John E. Kleber has noted, concur with the prevailing view in Kentucky that "there had been no fixed games before they were featured at Madison Square Garden." Wetherby himself observed in a letter written on May 15, 1952, that "it is of more than passing coincidence that the contamination of these young men occurred in New York."

University of Kentucky President Herman L. Donovan stoutly defended Rupp and refused to dismiss him, even when it became clear that such action would spare the team punishment by the Southeastern Conference (SEC) and the NCAA. On May 6, 1952, a scant week after Judge Streit delivered his opinion in New York, Donovan sent a letter to Rupp in which he pledged his full support of the coach. "My dear Coach Rupp," the letter began, "I want you to know that I shall not desert you in your hour of need. This is a good time for you to find out

³²"Preliminary Statement of the Joint Meeting of the Executive Committee, the Board of Trustees, the Board of Directors of the Athletics Association, and the Executive Committee of the Alumni Association of the University of Kentucky," May 5, 1952, manuscript copy, University of Kentucky Library.

³³Ashford interview; interview with A. B. Chandler, April 30, 1978.

³⁴John E. Kleber, ed., *The Public Papers of Governor Lawrence W. Wetherby*, 1950-1955 (Lexington, 1983), 218-19.

who are your real friends and who are your fair weather friends."35

Donovan did not, however, stop with words of encouragement. On May 16, 1952, he wrote a confidential letter to U.S. Senator Thomas R. Underwood in which he made a surprising and dangerous request: "Would it be possible for you to obtain information from the FBI and from the Dye's Committee [which was investigating subversives] on the standing and status of Judge Saul S. Streit. If this information is available, the Board of Trustees, the Athletics Board, and many of us here at the University would like to have these data." On the same day Donovan sent a "personal and confidential" note to University of Maryland President Harry C. Byrd. In it Donovan stated: "Our mutual friend, President Humphry of the University of Wyoming, telephoned me a few days ago saying that he believed you had a file of information regarding Judge Saul S. Streit of New York City. He suggested that I communicate with you and ask you if you would let me have such information as you may have collected. I can use it to good advantage if you have such a file." The UK president also promised, "I would certainly protect you should you send me any data on this Judge who is so interested in reforming athletics in Kentucky and elsewhere, and so determined to protect gamblers and racketeers in his own bailiwick." Byrd's response, a month later, was brief, judicious, and to the point:

Just a word to acknowledge your letter about Judge Streit of New York City. We did, last fall, check up somewhat on him. However, at a meeting of our Board of Regents, it was decided that the most intelligent procedure would be to make no reference to him whatsoever.

I believe that in your particular case the intelligent procedure would be to ignore him completely and consider the matter closed. This would be our attitude if we were in your place.³⁶

Byrd's advice apparently helped divert Donovan from an illadvised course of action. In the meantime the wheels of justice, or (in the opinion of Wildcat fans) injustice, were continuing to grind very fine indeed.

SEC and NCAA officials pondered the fate of UK's basket-

³⁵H. L. Dovovan Papers, University of Kentucky Library. ³⁶Ibid.

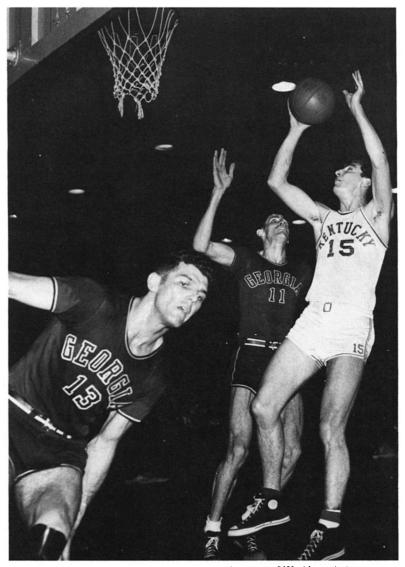
ball program. Finally, on August 11, 1952, the Executive Committee of the SEC announced its findings and decisions, and the punishment meted out was harsher than even the university had feared. The Wildcats were barred for one season from conference play and participation in postseason tournaments. Three months after the league ruling the NCAA also placed the university on athletic probation for a period of one year.³⁷

For Rupp, who always feared failure, the entire affair had to be a humiliating and debilitating experience. Gerry Calvert, who played on UK's varsity from the 1953/54 to the 1956/57 seasons and who later became Rupp's attorney and good friend, maintained in an interview that the Baron's problems with his eyes and with diabetes began much earlier than most people realized and that the strain and pressure on Rupp during the various investigations had a great and adverse effect on his health.³⁸

If the scandal was a traumatic experience for Rupp, it was devastating for the players involved. Dale Barnstable lost his job as teacher and head basketball coach at Manual High School in Louisville. The very promising basketball careers of Alex Groza and Ralph Beard were cut short by the scandal, while Bill Spivey, who had the potential to be one of the greatest of all pro players, never got an opportunity to play in the NBA. In the 1949/50 season, Groza and Beard, together with former "Fabulous Five" teammates Cliff Barker and Wah Wah Jones, began their careers as players and part-owners of the Indianapolis Olympians, a new franchise in the recently formed NBA. The Olympians finished their first season of existence as Western Division leaders (the league was divided into three divisions). Although the Olympians were defeated in the second round of the playoffs, the season was a success, both on the court and at the ticket office. Groza and Beard quickly emerged as two of the new league's brightest stars. At the end of the 1949/50 season, both were among the league's top ten scorers; and Groza, with a per game average 23.4, finished second to the Minneapolis Lakers' great center George Miken and his 27.4 average. Beard and Groza played just one more season before the scandal broke. Claiming it was necessary

³⁷Mathias, Albert D. Kirwan, 40-41; Charles G. Talbert, The University of Kentucky: The Maturing Years (Lexington, 1965), 111.

³⁸Interview with Gerry Calvert, February 7, 1983.



Courtesy UK Alumni Association

Three-time All-American Alex Groza scores against two bewildered Georgia Bulldog defenders in a February 1949 game that the Wildcats won 95-40. Groza would soon be named college basketball player of the year.

to protect the reputation of the young league, Commissioner Maurice Podoloff declared the two players "ineligible for life" and forced them to sell their shares in the Olympians for a fraction of the real worth. Spivey's fate was equally tragic. Even though he was not found guilty of wrongdoing, Spivey was banned for life from playing in the NBA, before he had a chance to appear in his first pro game.³⁹

Rupp and the university were penalized for one year, the 1952/53 season; Groza, Beard, and the other players paid for their mistakes with their careers. Ralph Beard for one, however, believes he was dealt with fairly by the university but does not feel the same about the treatment he received from the New York district attorney's office, Judge Streit, or the NBA and Maurice Podoloff. Not only did Podoloff ban Beard for life from playing in the NBA, but "Streit said that if I so much as touched a basketball in a YMCA, he'd throw my tail in jail." The same prohibitions and threatened punishments applied to Groza, Barnstable, and the other UK players involved in the scandal.

What effect did the traumatic experience of the scandals of 1951 have on college basketball? Over the long term, very little. Genuine efforts were made to reform intercollegiate sports in general, but after the initial shock wore off things returned to normal. As early as November 1951, the American Council of Education (ACE) named a committee of ten college presidents "to investigate the intercollegiate sports problem." The basketball scandals sent shock waves spreading throughout the "educational circle," as an Associated Press sportswriter put it, and the "alarmed educators" were promising to reform thoroughly all college athletics. The objective was to place intercollegiate sports under "strict campus control." To achieve this goal, basic reforms were proposed, including (1) the integration of college athletic departments into the campus administration with the control of finances passing into academic hands, and (2) an open and aboveboard policy of supplying financial help for athletes within strict limits where there is positive need as well as academic fitness.

Both items are essential elements in the reform of inter-

³⁹Daniel Neft et al., *The Sports Encyclopedia: Pro Basketball* (New York, 1975), 84-100.

⁴⁰Beard interview.

⁴¹Printed in Louisville Courier-Journal, November 14, 1951.

collegiate athletics, but they have yet to be implemented. They are periodically dusted off and offered to the public when new scandals or revelations of corruption are revealed. There is also a contemporary ring to two proposals which Michigan State President John Hannah announced to the press in 1951 at the time of his appointment as chairman of the newly created ACE President's Committee. Hannah's academic background was evident in his proposal that "an athlete to be eligible should constantly qualify in courses that lead toward receiving a *four-year* college degree" (emphasis added). A self-proclaimed "sports fan," Hannah also condemned the lack of restrictions "on organized alumni, booster clubs or other sports enthusiasts." He therefore believed that control of finances should be taken out of the hands of alumni groups and given to the colleges. 42

Although in the years since 1951 restrictions have been placed on the activities of "boosters," overzealous supporters are still responsible for much of the corruption that continues to plague intercollegiate athletics.⁴³ The unfortunate fact is that in the thirty-

42 Ibid.

⁴³At the 1982 NCAA tournament, Notre Dame coach Digger Phelps informed the press that colleges were offering high school players as much as ten thousand dollars to sign grants-in-aid. The informed reaction to Phelps' claim was that, if anything, he had underestimated the amounts that changed hands. One former college star told Chicago Tribune reporter Fred Mitchell that "anybody who expects an athlete to live off the money from a scholarship is not being fair to the athlete. An athlete should learn to take care of No. 1 early." Another player recalled taking part in an all-star game after his senior year in high school. After the game, in which he scored thirty points, "two guys representing a major college came up to our room and laid \$25,000 out on the bed. Just laid it all out there. I'd never seen that much money before in my life." He did not accept that offer (Chicago Tribune, April 17, 1982). In a long-overdue effort to respond to the rising chorus of accusations of corruption, the NCAA in 1983 voted to tighten college entrance requirements for scholarship athletes. Wall Street Journal sports columnist Frederick C. Klein was not impressed. "The NCAA has sought to deal with the recent, heightened concern about college-sports corruption in a typical fashion," the disgusted Klein observed, "by shifting the onus to the student-athlete. It has legislated tougher future admissions and eligibility requirements for such recruits, thus protecting its members from some of the 'unqualified' students they now so ardently pursue'' (Wall Street Journal, December 2, 1983). Further evidence of the NCAA's ability to ignore reality was provided by Walter Byers in an October 13, 1984, interview. Talking with a New York Times reporter, Byers, the executive director of the NCAA, acknowledged that "some" college athletes receive twenty thousand dollars or more a year from boosters. And, he admitted, "the NCAA is losing ground in its attempt to enforce the rules and maintain the integrity of big-time college sports." The solution, according to Byers, is the enactment by his organization of stricter regulations. In response to Byers' call to action, the NCAA convened a special convention in June 1985, to "tighten colleges" control over

five years since the scandal broke, college basketball has become more, rather than less, professionalized and commercialized — and the same is true of college football. As reporter Jerry Kirshenbaum observed in an October 1984 Sports Illustrated article, a basic problem still plaguing intercollegiate athletics is that "going for big bucks is O.K. for TV networks, coaches and schools, but not for the athletes who put on the show."⁴⁴

[their] athletic departments "(*The Chronicle of Higher Education* [May 15, 1985], 35). Although several important proposals to change association rules were passed (*Ibid.* [June 26, 1985], 1), America's college presidents still have a long way to go before they can claim they control their own athletic programs and departments.

⁴⁴Sports Illustrated (October 22, 1984), 22.