

Shaving Lather

Say it's all even, Stevin: An Ivy League economist sees evidence of frequent fixing in big-time college basketball

IN HIS first-person account of the 1994 point-shaving scandal at Arizona State (SI, Nov. 9, 1998), former Sun Devils guard Stevin (Hedake) Smith explained why it's easy for players to cover their tracks when the fix is in. Smith didn't tank games. He simply made sure his team failed to cover the point spread by letting up on defense. "Yes, I shaved points, but I didn't do it by throwing wild passes or taking horrible shots,"

in 6% of games with large spreads, or 500 times in 16 seasons, are too statistically significant to be random. He says they're more likely due to what he calls "mutually beneficial effort manipulation"—point shaving.

Wolfers hasn't discussed his findings with college hoops officials. But they don't contradict a 2003 NCAA survey in which 1.5% of Division I players said a teammate had taken money from



SPREAD CASE Smith (right) helped bettors cash in at Vegas books.



Smith wrote. "Those are the things everybody looks for."

There may be other tip-offs the average fan doesn't see. The NCAA hasn't had a major point-shaving case since Arizona State, but Justin Wolfers, an economist at Penn's Wharton School of Business, says a new generation of Hedakes could be fixing games all over the country. Wolfers studied the results of 44,120 Division I games played between 1989 and 2005. Overall, teams that were favored by oddsmakers beat the spread 50.01% of the time.

But a startling trend emerged when a team was favored by 12 or more points. Strong favorites covered only 48.37% of the time—and just missed covering (say, winning by 11 when they were favored by 12) far more often than shorter favorites. To Wolfers the deviations, which occurred

gamblers to play poorly. "That was a real wake-up call to our membership," says Rachel Newman-Baker, the NCAA's director of Agent, Gambling and Amateurism Activities. "We're taking a more proactive approach [against point shaving]."

This week members of Newman-Baker's staff, along with FBI agents, will lecture players at the men's and women's regional sites about point shaving. (In past years only Final Four teams received such visits.) The NCAA also has a representative in Las Vegas keeping an eye on sports books; the NCAA is trying to set up a system that requires books to report suspicious gambling patterns. Says Newman-Baker, "The gambling issue comes to the forefront during the tournament." If Wolfers is right, though, it's a seasonlong concern. —S.C.

Q&A



Mark Price

The former NBA All-Star, 42, is coach of the Melbourne-based South Dragons in Australia's National Basketball League

SI: Are you uttering things like "Good onya" around the house?

Price: Jokingly, I have. And I'm getting a lot of "G'day, mate" from my friends right now.

SI: How did the job come about?

Price: A couple months ago the new Melbourne franchise sent a guy [Adrian Newell] to the States to scout players and coaches. A mutual friend had given him my name. Australian basketball was not at the top of my mind. But the longer my family and I looked at it, the more it seemed it might work.

SI: You're close with Danny Ferry, the G.M. of the Cavs. Your team is allowed two imports. Why not try to sell LeBron James on the beach and the world's friendliest people?

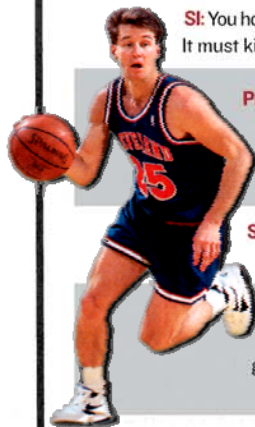
Price: Danny might not be my friend anymore if that happens. And LeBron might have to take a pay cut to play in Australia.

SI: How good is the brand of basketball in the NBL?

Price: Probably above the major college level.

SI: How popular is basketball in Australia?

Price: The most popular sports are Australian rules football and cricket. Basketball would probably follow. More young kids play basketball over there than any sport, particularly with guys like Andrew Bogut making a splash in the States.



SI: You hold the NBA's career free throw mark (90.4%). It must kill you to see players brick free throws.

Price: It's frustrating to watch guys miss free throws so often. My dad was a coach, and that was one of his pet peeves. And I didn't want my dad to yell at me.

SI: Have you seen an Aussie rules football game?

Price: I was watching a lot of it when I was over there. But they call it footy. You gotta get your lingo right. —Richard Deitsch