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The Road to Success Is Paved by Cheating

By [SELENA ROBERTS](#)

The gambler accused of playing three-card monte with the truth — find it if you can — played the odds on athlete integrity by luring players from the University of Toledo into a point-shaving scheme.

The gambler, identified only as Gary in a criminal complaint filed two weeks ago in United States District Court in Detroit, wooed football and basketball players with dinners at a casino, with groceries and gifts, with as much as \$10,000 in cash to sit out of games, according to The Detroit Free Press.

Beat the point spread. Beat the system. A win-win.

The payoff was most likely as seductive as it was lucrative to any athlete living on a limited budget, but the setup needed a frontman with a face to recruit player participants. Authorities charged the senior running back Harvey McDougle Jr., who is known as Scooter, with recruiting teammates to fix games for the gambler. McDougle's lawyer has proclaimed his client's innocence, but how could an athlete be persuaded to violate the great taboo of sports?

Cheating is fundamental.

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In a disturbing survey of 5,275 high school athletes conducted in 2005 and 2006, recently released by the Josephson Institute of Ethics, students involved in athletics basically mocked the sports paradigm as a character-building savior of souls.

In fact, high school athletes are more likely than their peers to enter an exam with a crib sheet. According to the survey, students involved in sports cheat in school at a higher rate than their nonathlete classmates by a margin of 65 percent to 60 percent.

Suddenly, cheating is the new teenage sex: Everybody is doing it. "I think it has become part of the brain," said Michael Josephson, president of the nonprofit institute in Los Angeles. "Technically, athletes see cheating as wrong, but it's also how we compete in every walk of life, in politics, business and sports."

Athletes are not learning the art of dishonor from the bathroom walls. Many youth coaches are terrific people, but the pressure to succeed on the prep level has prompted some to rationalize rule-bending as gamesmanship.

The wink-wink methods have filtered down to the students, as this survey of high school athletes found.

¶43 percent of boys and 22 percent of girls said it was proper for a coach to teach basketball players how to

illegally hold and push.

¶41 percent of boys and 25 percent of girls saw nothing wrong with using a stolen playbook sent by an anonymous supporter before a big game.

¶37 percent of boys and 20 percent of girls said it was proper for a coach to instruct a player to fake an injury.

¶29 percent of boys and 16 percent of girls said it was acceptable for a coach to urge parents to allow an academically successful athlete to repeat a grade in middle school so that the athlete would be older and bigger for high school sports.

¶6.4 percent of boys and 2 percent of girls admitted to using performance-enhancing drugs.

“What is cheating?” as [Barry Bonds](#) said during a news conference two years ago. A month later, he added: “We need to forget about the past and let us play the game.

“We’re entertainers. Let us entertain.”

The line between mendacity and showbiz has become defined by stage cues offered in the form of TV highlights and public reaction.

[Nascar](#) punished a group of devious drivers at February’s Daytona 500 — was that fuel additive in Michael Waltrip’s car from Wile E. Coyote’s trench coat? — but the controversy didn’t taint the sport. It simply prompted a rousing “That’s racin’ ” response from many fans.

At the Masters, the new square-head driver is all the rage as golfers address a round ball with a club face modeled on Senator [Ted Kennedy](#)’s jaw line. Technology is closing in as the steroid of golf, which doesn’t test for illegal substances in a game increasingly tied to extra yardage. And yet golfers are reflexively celebrated for passing the white-glove test on clean play.

On Amazon, shoppers can find a how-to guide for corking a bat with the recent release of “The Cheater’s Guide to Baseball.” Yesterday, the book was among the site’s top 500 best sellers and ranked fourth in sports books.

Cheating has its history, but violations of Black Sox lore didn’t dismantle the wholesome sports archetype for youth. The erosion is as new age as the American obsession with C.E.O. consumption.

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The former Red Sox All-Star Jim Rice underscored the ideology of sports values last week when he addressed an audience at a PawSox luncheon in Lincoln, R.I. As The Providence Journal reported, Rice told the crowd of more than 400, including players, that greed and cheating were essential to advancing a baseball career in this big-money era.

He exempted steroids from his approved acts of trickery, but little else.

“You have to learn how to stay,” Rice said. “What do I have to do? If I’ve got to cheat, I got to cheat. I don’t

care. I want to be in the big leagues.”

This line of thinking is sanctioned by public opinion even if cheating includes steroid suspicions. In a New York Times/CBS poll last month, Americans were asked: “Are you rooting for Barry Bonds to break Hank Aaron’s record, or do you hope he will fall short?” Of the respondents with an opinion, 35 percent said they hoped he surpassed Aaron’s mark, while 30 percent said they wanted him to fall short. The numbers changed drastically when the responses were grouped by age. Of those under 45, 43 percent were pulling for Bonds.

Rules are so yesterday, so uncool. As Josephson said, “We have the disease of low expectations.”

It is difficult to expect every teenager to distinguish between steroid use and square-head drivers, between N.B.A. flops and point shaving, when the sports culture conflates all forms of cheating with succeeding.

Gamblers prey on the vulnerable. A young player who has been conditioned to confuse winning with beating the system is an easy target.

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