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The Last Temptation of Rick Pitino: A Story of Corruption, Scandal, and the Big Business of College Basketball

By Michael Sokolove. Published 2018 by Penguin Random House, New York. (272 pages).

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Corruption in college basketball has been an unspoken truth for athletic programs and fans alike. While it is not mentioned in traditional media circles, rumors and circumstantial evidence is spread across blogs, message boards, and social media. In *The Last Temptation of Rick Pitino: A Story of Corruption, Scandal, and the Big Business of College Basketball*, author Michael Sokolove brings the latest (and greatest) college basketball scandal to the forefront, providing the audience an overview of the University of Louisville, Rick Pitino, and the downfall of an up-and-coming athletic department under the leadership of Tom Jurich.

The first chapter provides an overview of the major characters in the scandal. Rick Pitino is a well-known coach who had great success at Boston University, Providence College, University of Kentucky, and University of Louisville and known for attaining greater team success than the individual talent of his players. Leading the University of Louisville's athletic department was Tom Jurich, who had started as UL's AD in 1997 and oversaw a complete transformation of the program's athletic facilities. The player at the center of the scandal was Brian Bowen, a highly-sought-after recruit from Saginaw, Michigan.

Chapter two gives a historical review of scandal within college basketball. It goes over how even the most successful coaches in college basketball history, including John Wooden and Clair Bee, were tainted with players receiving impermissible benefits, unethical behavior, and point-shaving. As revenues rapidly increased in college basketball, shoe companies, such as Adidas and Nike, decided to entice coaches with lucrative contracts for them and their team to wear their apparel as a means to provide national prominence to the shoe company.

In the third chapter, a background is provided on Brian Bowen. Bowen grew up in a mixed-racial family in Saginaw, Michigan, a blue-collar town known as a recruiting hotbed for high school basketball. He grew up around the game; his dad was previously a college basketball player and his cousin, Jason Richardson, had a lengthy career in the NBA. Many expected Bowen to attend Michigan State like Richardson, but Bowen dragged along his recruitment

longer than almost every other top recruit. Of the schools in which he was most interested, Louisville was never mentioned in the lead up to his commitment.

The fourth chapter provides a succinct history of the University of Louisville, the hiring of Tom Jurich, the hiring of Rick Pitino, and Pitino's scandal and legal case involving his extramarital affair and subsequent extortion attempt by Karen Cypher. This chapter also provides greater detail on the meager situation of the University of Louisville's athletic department before Jurich was hired and subsequently hired Rick Pitino, which significantly raised their athletic profile. Over time, these changes allowed U of L to improve their conference affiliation from Conference USA to the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC).

Chapter five dives deeper into the transgressions within Rick Pitino's tenure at Louisville. First was "Strippergate", which involved a member of the basketball coaching staff paying for an escort service to bring strippers into the basketball-only dorm and dance and have sex with prospective and current basketball players. Pitino, as he commonly does in the face of allegations, claimed he was not aware of the situation and placed the blame solely on one of his coaches, Andre McGee. The NCAA investigated and ultimately gave Louisville heavy sanctions, including the forced vacating of their 2013 national championship.

Chapter six provides an overview of AAU basketball and the handlers connected to prospective basketball recruits. The book demonstrates aspiring basketball players will travel around the country and pay large amounts of money to be in front of talent evaluators. This environment creates an opportunity for shoe companies to capitalize on the situation and provide the necessary financial capital to basketball recruits identified as the best of the bunch, often providing free apparel, flights, and hotel stays. The hope of these financial backers is that those athletes later will sign an apparel deal with their company if they make it to the NBA. Shoe companies are not the only stakeholder trying to seize the moment. Handlers, people that identify the high-level basketball talent in young players, will start associating with the family and become part of the decision-making group for the aspiring recruit. These handlers are often problematic for family and coaching staffs alike, as they become involved with the family in hopes of getting a portion of the payout, either impermissible benefits or professional contracts later on.

Chapter seven explores the FBI investigation that led to Pitino's and Jurich's downfall. Bowen's family was promised \$100,000 in return for him signing with University of Louisville. This agreement was recorded through FBI wiretaps. The start of the FBI investigation started with charges on Louis Martin Blazer III on fraud and embezzlement. Blazer responded by offering the FBI an opportunity at another case involving fraud within college basketball. This offer was accepted and led to wiretaps from Blazer to a number of stakeholders within college basketball, including Christian Dawkins, the "family friend" associated with Brian Bowen's recruitment. After enough information was collected, the FBI made their announcement of findings and subsequent arrests, including seven prominent NCAA assistant coaches.

In chapter eight, the overview of the investigation continued, including the beginnings of the court case. The author describes how the FBI wiretaps executed on Dawkins' phone led to evidence against the assistant coaches, including Book Richardson (Arizona), Lamont Evans (South Carolina first, Oklahoma State later), and Tony Bland (Southern California). The chapter ends with the initial procedural moves from the defense attorneys, which failed to be successful.

The ninth chapter has a narrative similar to many in the academic field of college athletics, as it winds through the hypocrisy of college athletics being defined as amateurism when so many stakeholders, such as athletic directors, coaches, non-profit bowl games, and

many others reap millions of dollars off the backs of low-paid labor. As the author transitions back to the court case, it discusses the fatal flaws within the criminal enterprise, as more and more money was promised to the Bowens and lacking the financial certainty that they can actually deliver on their promises. The chapter wraps up with further explanation of how Dawkins was using Bowen as a pawn in discussions with college basketball programs in order to secure agency agreements with players on their current roster that were likely to be drafted in the upcoming NBA draft.

Chapter 10 brings the fallout. It starts with Pitino being summoned to the university president's office and being notified his contract was terminated. Pitino has been defiant since the beginning, feeling he has been unfairly cast as the antagonist and that the university lacked appreciation for the success he has brought to the program. Following his firing, Pitino has filed two lawsuits, one against University of Louisville for wrongful termination, another against Adidas for emotional distress, claiming their illicit activities cause irreversible damage to his reputation. Those cases are still pending.

Chapter 11 continues the fallout with the termination of Louisville athletic director, Tom Jurich. While he performed admirably to build the athletic facilities and strong athletic brand for the university, his loyalty to his coaches ultimately led to his downfall. One potential mess left behind was his deal with the City of Louisville for the creation of the KFC Yum Center, a downtown basketball arena. The city built it to accommodate both Louisville basketball *and* attempt to convince an NBA team to move to Louisville. The problem is the city gave the University of Louisville such a one-sided deal on the arena that it was impossible to recruit an NBA team due to conflicts of interest. Later on, the university and Jurich reached a settlement of \$7.5 million and portrayed his dismissal as a retirement instead of a "for cause" termination.

The final chapter is similar to chapter nine, as it goes over the depths of college athletics providing little compensation to student-athletes in return for their athletic participation. The text elucidates the options, and challenges, of correctly compensating athletes for their labor. These options are common to those who have read other literature on the topic: Should athletes receive a cut of the revenue? Should athletes be allowed to sell their likeness? Should athletes be allowed to declare for the NBA draft immediately after high school? The NCAA has recently begun a deeper examination into college basketball and finding ways to revamp the sport to reduce impermissible benefits provided to athletes and remove many of the "shadowy" figures that attach themselves to the families of high-profile athletes.

Overall, the book is a good overview of the recruiting-related scandals that happen in college athletics. For those wanting to learn more about the pitfalls involved with AAU basketball and non-family members (and some family members) that become associated with sought-after recruits, this book is a great start. While not promoting it, the author also provides a robust view of athletic department contracts and the compensation/benefits provided to personnel that provide extreme financial commitments and large buyouts. This book would be a strong resource for undergraduates and graduates studying sport law (criminal and civil situations) and college athletics. However, this book is limited in that (a) the cases haven't been finalized, (b) the context involving other important figures, such as University of Louisville President James Ramsay and others in his office at the time, was truncated within the text, and (c) the author doesn't throw his weight into a solution for solving many of the problems discussed in the book.