

Man connected to Colombo crime family tried to fix NCAA game last season, feds say

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An investigation into one of America's most notorious crime families affected the college basketball world last week.

The Eastern District of New York announced last week (<https://www.justice.gov/usao-edny/pr/20-defendants-charged-crimes-including-racketeering-extortion-loansharking>) a series of indictments against the Colombo crime family thanks to evidence collected via court-ordered wiretapping.

Among the conversations discovered was a "scheme to fix an NCAA college basketball game" in December 2018. The release alleges Benjamin Bifalco, 25, approached players of an unnamed team and offered them thousands of dollars to throw the game. Bifalco faces charges of sports bribery (<https://www.justice.gov/usao-edny/press-release/file/1206861/download>).

"Today's indictment and arrest of an individual for attempting to fix the outcome of a December 2018 college basketball game reinforces that game-manipulation threats and risks are real and ever-present," the NCAA said. "We are actively monitoring the situation, which is a part of the criminal process, and will respond accordingly if it is determined that NCAA rules were violated."

According to intercepted phone calls, Bifalco told one of the 20 defendants charged Thursday in the grander scheme, Joseph Amato Jr., the son of an alleged Colombo captain, to bet thousands of dollars on the game. Amato then sent a pair of texts to another indicted associate, Thomas Scordia, an alleged member of the Colombo mob family, culminating with him "not touching it personally."

With sports gambling legal in 11 states and a growing enterprise, the vigilance against bad actors remains a sticking point for detractors of the movement.

"The successful outcome of this investigation shows our continued efforts to target and hold responsible organized criminal syndicates," New York Police Department Commissioner James O'Neill said. "I thank our investigators and law enforcement counterparts whose cooperation was vital to bringing these individuals to justice."