

The 145-Pound Long Snapper and Other Tales of College Admissions Puffery

The admissions scandal involved lies about sports exploits that should have been simple to detect if someone had bothered to look.



William Singer leaving the federal courthouse in Boston on Tuesday. Singer pleaded guilty to four charges related to the admissions scheme. Credit...Brian Snyder/Reuters

By Matthew Futterman and Naila-Jean Meyers

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The ruse was oddly simple.

Since college coaches can often recommend more athletes to the admissions department than a team needs, why not buy a few slots from the coaches and [sell them to parents desperate](#) to get their children into the most selective universities?

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about William Singer's scheme was how easily he could have been found out. With a handful of keystrokes, or maybe a phone call, admissions officers could have discovered that applicants were simply posing as athletes.

Then it might have been discovered that a purported pole-vaulter had probably never touched a pole, that a long snapper had stopped playing football, that a supposedly fast swimmer wasn't fast at all. Indeed, the doctored photographs used to support claims of athletic ability are pretty unconvincing.

Yet as simple as it would have been to uncover the plot, the scheme lasted at least seven years, according to the federal indictment detailing the fraud led by Singer.

Singer pleaded [guilty to racketeering and other charges](#) on Tuesday, when documents from the case were made public. Among other things, those documents provided information on the applications of the following students:

The basketball 'all-star'

Gamal Abdelaziz, a resident of Las Vegas and a former casino executive, stands accused of bribing Donna Heinel, the University of Southern California associate athletic director, to designate his daughter as a recruit for the U.S.C. basketball team.

To make that happen, Abdelaziz's daughter needed to be portrayed as a standout basketball player. Singer is said to have enlisted an assistant soccer coach at U.S.C. named Laura Janke to create a profile of a girl who starred for a high school team in Asia, garnering such honors as "Asia Pacific Activities Conference All Star Team," "2016 China Cup Champions," "Hong Kong Academy team M.V.P.," and "team captain."

During a phone call in January, according to the documents, Singer told Abdelaziz that the admissions office had asked Heinel why Abdelaziz's daughter did not end up on the basketball team. According to Singer, Heinel told the admissions official that the daughter had sustained an injury over the summer that would cause her to be out for six to eight months. Plantar fasciitis was the diagnosis, Singer said.

Heinel and at least one U.S.C. coach named in the case have been fired.

The pole-vaulter who didn't pole-vault

In 2017, Heinel presented the son of a media executive named Elisabeth Kimmel to U.S.C.'s subcommittee for athletic admissions. The son was supposedly a three-year varsity letter-winner in track and field and one of the top pole-vaulters in California.

His application sailed through, gaining approval on Oct. 10, 2017, even though the boy's high school had no record of his ever taking part in the pole vault. This was apparently familiar territory for Kimmel, who the documents said had used Singer to gain admission to Georgetown for her daughter as a tennis player. Her daughter didn't play a single match for the Hoyas during her four years at the school.

In the case of her son, Kimmel expressed concern that he was supposed to register with the N.C.A.A., and for him to do that, his high school was going to have to send his records. That might be a problem, Kimmel is said to have told Singer, because her son's guidance counselor knew he was not a pole-vaulter.

Eventually Kimmel figured out how to send the paperwork to the N.C.A.A. herself, but another hiccup occurred when Kimmel's son appeared on campus: His adviser asked him about his athletic exploits. The boy — who was not in on the scheme, according to his mother — told the adviser that he had no idea what she was talking about and that there had to have been some mistake. According to Kimmel, the adviser said she was going to check into it.

As of January, according to court filings, Kimmel's son was "still in the dark" about the way he had gained admission.

A team manager who became a tennis recruit

The University of Texas has an excellent men's tennis team, routinely ranked among the top 20 in the country.

In 2015, Singer said, he approached the team's head coach, Michael Center, about a potential student from Los Altos Hills, Calif., an affluent suburb in Silicon Valley. Could Center facilitate admission for the boy as a tennis recruit?

The boy's application listed him as a manager of his high school basketball and football teams. The only tennis mentioned in his application was one year of playing as a high school freshman. Regardless, Center secured the boy a scholarship that covered the cost

of books. The boy arrived at Texas for the 2015-16 school year and renounced his scholarship and his participation on the tennis team on Sept. 4, 2015.

The university announced on Wednesday that Center had been fired.

The long snapper and the kicker

Marci Palatella, the chief executive of a liquor distribution company in Burlingame, Calif., was looking for a way to get her son into U.S.C., and Singer suggested athletics.

That might be a problem, Palatella is said to have replied, because her son had stopped playing football. Nevertheless, the court documents said, a profile was created for Palatella's son portraying him as an active player on his high school football team — as part of the defensive line and as a long snapper and also as a member of several local and statewide championship teams from 2015 to 2017.

Later, Singer would be heard on tape bragging about such a scheme to another client, William E. McGlashan Jr., a senior executive at a global private equity firm.

“Well I had a boy last year, I made him a long snapper,” Singer said.

“I love it,” McGlashan replied.

“He was 145 pounds. Long snapper,” Singer said.

“I love it. I love it,” McGlashan said. “That is so funny.”

For McGlashan, Singer opted for a different strategy, since the long snapper ruse had just been used. McGlashan's son played lacrosse, but U.S.C. did not have a lacrosse team. So the boy was described as a kicker, even though his high school had no football team.

No problem, Singer explained, “because they have all these kicking camps, and these kickers always get picked up outside of the school.”

Correction:

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An earlier version of this article misspelled the surname of the man whose daughter was admitted to U.S.C. as a basketball recruit. He is Gamal Abdelaziz, not Adbelaziz.