

Ex-Casino Executive Gets 1 Year and 1 Day in Prison in College Admissions Scheme

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 09 February 2022 17:56 -

A former casino executive was sentenced on Wednesday to a year and a day in prison for participating in a conspiracy to secure his daughter's admission to the University of Southern California as a Division I basketball recruit even though she did not make the varsity team in high school, prosecutors said.

The [sentence](#) for the former executive, Gamal Abdelaziz, 64, of Las Vegas, was the longest yet in the continuing federal prosecution of parents, coaches and others involved in a college admissions bribery scheme.

More than 50 people have been charged in the sprawling case, which was orchestrated, prosecutors said, by William Singer, a Newport Beach, Calif., businessman who has been cooperating with federal investigators since September 2018.

In addition to the prison term, Mr. Abdelaziz must also serve two years of supervised release, complete 400 hours of community service and pay a \$250,000 fine, prosecutors said. Other parents convicted in the case have received far shorter sentences.

The actress Lori Loughlin was [released from federal prison](#) in December 2020 after she completed a two-month sentence for conspiring to pass her daughters off as rowers so they could be admitted to U.S.C. Another actress, Felicity Huffman, who pleaded guilty to paying \$15,000 to inflate her daughter's SAT score, [served 11 days](#) in prison.

But prosecutors wrote in a sentencing memorandum that, unlike many parents who participated in the scheme, Mr. Abdelaziz had been "intimately involved in the lies at every step of his daughter's fraudulent admission to U.S.C."

He and John Wilson, a private equity financier, were also the first defendants to stand trial in the federal investigation known as [Operation Varsity Blues](#). Others such as Ms. Huffman and Ms. Loughlin chose to plead guilty rather than take their chances before a jury.

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After a four-week trial, Mr. Abdelaziz and Mr. Wilson were both [found guilty in October](#) of charges of conspiracy to commit bribery and fraud.

Mr. Wilson was also found guilty of additional fraud and bribery charges, and of filing a false tax return for taking a deduction for a payment that the government called a bribe. His sentencing is scheduled for next Wednesday.

In 2017, prosecutors said, Mr. Abdelaziz agreed to pay Mr. Singer \$300,000 to ensure his daughter's admission to U.S.C. as a basketball recruit, even though she had not played basketball for more than a year and, when she had, was a member of her high school's junior varsity team.

As part of the scheme, prosecutors said, Mr. Abdelaziz sent Mr. Singer a photograph of another girl playing basketball for a "fake athletic profile."

He also "lied to another college counselor to hide his daughter's admission to U.S.C. as a basketball recruit," prosecutors said. And he oversaw the editing of his daughter's U.S.C. application and essay, which began, prosecutors said, with the line: "The basketball court is like my art studio."

In September 2018, Mr. Abdelaziz's daughter enrolled at U.S.C., but she did not join the basketball team, prosecutors said.

Prosecutors had recommended a sentence of 14 months in prison, writing in the memorandum that Mr. Abdelaziz "has not only failed to accept responsibility for his conduct but continues, even now, to minimize his culpability with deflections and excuses."

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More than 50 people charged. In 2019, a federal investigation known as [Operation Varsity Blues](#) snared dozens of parents, coaches and exam administrators in a

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[vast college admissions scheme](#)

that implicated athletic programs at the University of Southern California, Yale, Stanford and other schools.

The linchpin. William Singer is an admissions counselor at the [center of the scheme](#). He led an [elabo](#)
[rate effort](#) to bribe coaches and test monitors, falsify exam scores and fabricate student biographies. He has pleaded guilty and is cooperating with the government. He has not been sentenced.

Mr. Abdelaziz's lawyers had asked for a sentence of four months, saying he should be treated similarly to other parents in the case, whose sentences have ranged from home confinement to nine months in prison.

Nineteen of the 30 parents sentenced so far received terms of three months or less, Mr. Abdelaziz's lawyers wrote.

They wrote that "public confidence in the criminal justice system would be undermined if the court sentenced the only defendant to go to trial to substantially more imprisonment than any of his 30 co-defendants, almost all of whom engaged in conduct more culpable than Mr. Abdelaziz."

"Mr. Abdelaziz has spent the majority of his 65 years working hard and helping others," the lawyers wrote, describing Mr. Abdelaziz's rise from poverty in Cairo, Egypt, where he was born, to top positions at MGM Grand, MGM Hospitality and Wynn Resorts.

"But he made one terrible mistake — a mistake that has already cost him his business, tarnished his reputation and placed a great strain on his family," the lawyers wrote.

On Wednesday, Brian T. Kelly, one of Mr. Abdelaziz's lawyers, said the sentence, while more than what he had hoped for, "certainly could have been worse."

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“At this stage, we intend to appeal and vindicate Mr. Abdelaziz through the appellate process,” he said.

Read more <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/09/us/varsity-blues-sentence-gamal-abdelaziz.html>