

Jury convicts player smugglers

By CURT ANDERSON
Associated Press

MIAMI — A Miami jury on Wednesday convicted a Florida sports agent and a baseball trainer on charges they smuggled Cuban baseball players to the U.S. in search of big profits from professional free agent contracts.

The verdict came after jurors heard about six weeks of testimony in the trial of Bartolo Hernandez and Julio Estrada, who were indicted on conspiracy and alien smuggling charges for an operation that began in 2009 and involved a number of high-profile Major League Baseball players.

Trial evidence showed an existing Cuban smuggling operation that brought people from the communist-run island to Mexico became the platform in 2009 for the much more lucrative trade in elite ballplayers. People involved in that operation testified it was ultimately overseen by Hernandez and Estrada.

The players would be whisked from Cuba to Mexico or Haiti in a speedboat, sign papers claiming residency in their new country and eventually be cleared to sign with MLB teams. Prosecutors showed jurors how many of those documents contained false information, such as made-up jobs for players, and some travel documents were forged.

In one of the trial's memorable moments, Chicago White Sox star Jose Abreu testified that he ate a piece of his phony Haitian passport while flying to the U.S. in 2013 because he feared repercussions if he landed in Miami with a fake document. Abreu soon after signed a \$68 million deal with Chicago.

Testimony also showed there was competition in Mexico for custody of the players involving criminal organizations. Seattle Mariners outfielder Leonys Martin told jurors about an attempt to kidnap him in which men who claimed to be armed broke into his apartment with a crowbar. Martin eventually walked across the U.S. border at Laredo, Texas, and signed a \$15.5 million contract with the Texas Rangers, who later traded him.

Another player, Reinier Roibal, testified about witnessing an armed confrontation at a Mexican boatyard between one of the smuggling ring's original leaders, Joan "Nacho" Garcia, and a group of men. Roibal said he heard gunshots and Garcia, who prosecutors called "the chief thug of Cancun," was never heard from again.

In each case, the players were required to sign contracts agreeing to pay Estrada and his organization about a third of whatever they made with U.S. teams, with Hernandez getting 5 percent to represent them in negotiations with teams. Abreu, for example, said he paid Estrada more than \$7 million after signing his White Sox contract.

Neither Hernandez nor Estrada testified in their own defense. Under cross-examination by their lawyers, many of the players said they decided to take illegal actions on their own and were not directed to do so by either man. They often claimed they were unaware of what was on residency or travel documents they were signing, and were simply eager to get to the U.S. and play ball.

The defense attorneys told jurors Hernandez and Estrada ran legitimate businesses and were not over-seeing an illegal smuggling ring. They provided the Cuban players with training, food and lodging and helped them navigate the complexities of becoming cleared to play in the U.S. despite the economic embargo against Cuba.



NCAA Tournament

USC, UC Davis move on from First Four

By MITCH STACY
Associated Press

DAYTON, Ohio — Bennie Boatwright scored a career-high 24 points as Southern Cal rallied from a 17-point deficit in the second half to beat Providence 75-71 in a First Four game Wednesday night.

The comeback victory was revenge for the Trojans, who lost to Providence by one point in the opening round of the NCAA Tournament last year. They move on to play 6th-seeded SMU at Tulsa, Oklahoma, on Friday.

After Providence led by 15 points at halftime and went up by 17 to start the second half, Southern Cal (25-9) mounted a furious rally. The Trojans closed it to five points at the 10-minute mark, and went up 61-60 on a jumper by Chimezie Metu off a turnover with 6:46 left.

Metu hit both ends of a 1-and-1 to put Southern Cal up 71-64 with 1:23 remaining and kept Providence from getting back into it down the stretch.

Jordan McLaughlin scored 18 points for Southern Cal, and Metu



USC's Jordan McLaughlin (11) drives against Providence's Jalen Lindsey (21) during the second half of Wednesday's First Four game in Dayton, Ohio.

AP Photo/John Minchillo

added 15 on 9-for-12 free throw shooting.

Emmitt Holt led Providence with 18 points and 11 rebounds. Jalen Lindsey and Rodney Bullock added 17 each.

The comeback was Southern Cal's 12th this season of at least 10 points, the most in the nation.

Providence outshot Southern Cal 49 percent to 42 percent, but the Friars outscored them in the second half 46-27.

It looked like a rout in the making at halftime. Providence (20-13) took a

44-29 lead on the strength of a 15-0 run punctuated by two 3-pointers by Bullock and another from Lindsey, who had 15 points in the first half. The Friars were 8 for 15 from 3-point range in the first half.

Southern Cal had just three field goals in the last 11 minutes of the half, and went without one in the last 4 1/2 minutes of the frame with Providence ripping off a 12-3 run in that span.

UC DAVIS 67, NC CENTRAL 63

DAYTON, Ohio (AP) — Chima Moneke had 18 points and 12 rebounds as UC Davis won in its first NCAA Tournament appearance, beating North Carolina Central 67-63 in a First Four game on Wednesday night.

The 16th-seeded Aggies rallied in the second half and held off North Carolina Central down the stretch to earn a trip to Tulsa to play No. 1 seed Kansas on Friday.

"Our guys grew up as little hoopers dreaming about playing and having

this opportunity," UC Davis coach Jim Les said. "And so it's special to be here. And we're just going to continue to fight, to keep this story going."

Brynton Lemar scored 15 points and Lawrence White added 14 for UC Davis, which had earned a trip to the tournament by winning the Big West Conference Tournament.

The Aggies (23-12) won despite 18 turnovers that led to 20 points for streaky North Carolina Central. But the Eagles couldn't overcome poor shooting that deteriorated even more in the second half.

The Eagles pulled within 64-63 with 1:49 left in the game on a 3-pointer by Dajuan Graf. North Carolina Central got the ball back with 37 seconds left, but another 3-point try by Graf was off the mark. Graf had to foul Lawrence White, who made two free throws with 16 seconds remaining to give the Eagles some breathing room. Lemar hit a foul shot with 4 seconds left to put it away.

Graf paced North Carolina Central (25-9) with 15 points. Kyle Benton and Patrick Cole added 13 each.

BMCC: Next rodeo action will be in April in Milton-Freewater

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to tie their steer in 7.0 for a narrow three-tenths win over ropers Candida Eldridge (BMCC) and Wyatt Williams (Boise State). He also was third in steer wrestling (8.0) to earn 252 points in the all-around and tied

Williams for the men's title. Danyelle Williams won the breakaway in 3.2, and also was fifth in goat tying (8.3).

The T-Wolves didn't win any events at the two-round WCCC Rodeo, but Preston Pederson was second in tie-down (24.9 on two) and

third in team roping with heeler and BMCC teammate Will Gallagher (5.6 on one) to earn a 35-point win in the all-around with 215.

Williams tied for the women's title with Janey Reeves of Idaho with 340 points. Williams was second in goat tying (15.6 on two),

third in barrel racing (29.05 on two) and fourth in breakaway (15.7 on two).

The weekend rodeos keep BMCC at the top of the leaderboard for the Northwest Region. The women's team is ranked second in the national standings, while the men sit comfortably at No.

18 in the country.

Next up, BMCC will head to the Northwest Regional Nos. 3 and 4 in Milton-Freewater April 15-16.

The BMCC women's rodeo team is the reigning national champion for the past two years.

YOUTH MOVEMENT: Farfan could get second start against Houston

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walking around the halls," Timbers coach Caleb Porter said, then joked: "He might miss out on prom, I don't know."

Farfan is not the youngest prospect to have appeared in a game this season. That honor goes to Vancouver's Alphonso Davies, who at 16 started for the Whitecaps in the opener against the

Philadelphia Union.

Davies was part of Vancouver's residency program, signing with the team last season at 15. He was the third-youngest player to sign a MLS contract and the second youngest after Freddy Adu to play in a match.

"Much of my week leading up to this was spent figuring out how to shut down a 16-year-old kid," Philadelphia coach Jim Curtin told

reporters after the two teams played to a scoreless draw in the season opener. "That's a credit to the player."

Other youngsters playing across the league this season include 17-year-old FC Dallas midfielder Paxton Pomykal, who started in last weekend's scoreless draw with Sporting Kansas City, and 17-year-old midfielder Ballou Jean-Yves Tabla, homegrown player for

Montreal who has appeared in both of the Impact's matches this season.

Farfan could get another chance on Saturday night when the Timbers host the surprising Houston Dynamo in a matchup of the very early undefeated teams. Portland got wins over Minnesota FC and the Galaxy, while the Dynamo defeated both the Sounders and the Columbus Crew, opening the season

with two straight matches at home in Houston. Forwards Romell Quioto and Erick "Cubo" Torres both scored a goal in each of the Dynamo's first two games. Portland's Fanendo Adi and Diego Valeri have two goals apiece for Portland.

Farfan could get his second start because defender Vytas Andriuskevicius, known as Vytas, is questionable with a calf injury.