

Tarnished Heisman



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"In order that there will be no misunderstanding regarding the eligibility of a candidate, the recipient of the award must be a bona fide student of an accredited university. The recipient must be in compliance with the bylaws defining an NCAA student." -- From the ballot for the Heisman Trophy December 10, 2005: Amid a roaring ovation and media crush, with his family standing proudly by his side, Reginald Alfred Bush is named the year's Heisman Trophy winner. With his honest demeanor, effervescent smile and, of course, stunning talent displayed on the fields of the University of Southern California, Reggie Bush is, on that celebratory night, the portrait of a great American sportsman, and the pinnacle of everything the NCAA espouses in its athletes. What America didn't know about the acclaimed college star was that, in direct violation of NCAA policies, Bush and his family had allegedly taken hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash and gifts long before he ever laid his hands on the Heisman. The rumors first surfaced one week before the 2006 NFL draft: allegations of improper benefits that transformed Bush's final year at USC into a financial windfall. The resulting scandal from such charges could mark one of the darkest chapters in college football history. Now, drawn together for the first time in "Tarnished Heisman," the facts are laid bare. Don Yaeger, a former "Sports Illustrated" investigative reporter who documented the Duke University lacrosse case in the shattering "New York Times" bestseller "It's Not About the Truth,"

reveals the heated controversy behind Bush's high-flying rise before turning pro for the New Orleans Saints, going back to his first taste of fame, when Bush landed in the pages of "Sports Illustrated" and all eyes were watching to see what was next for the USC sophomore. What few eyes saw, however, were the ties between Bush and two San Diego men, cofounders of a fledgling sports agency, who claim to have paid Bush and his family in cash and gifts to ensure his endorsement -- benefits including a vintage car, lavish trips, and an upscale home where Bush's family lived rent-free. Don Yaeger exposes the NCAA-prohibited activity in which Bush allegedly engaged, and also shows how USC and its coaching staff appeared to have turned a blind eye to the increasingly luxurious lifestyle of their star athlete and his family. With the explosive information revealed in "Tarnished Heisman," Bush stands to be ruled ineligible -- a decision that could cost his alma mater the 2004 national championship title, force the forfeit of every game Bush played in after losing his eligibility, and potentially strip Reggie Bush of the shining prize of his college career: the Heisman Trophy.

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