

YAHOO! SPORTS



Who is Nevin Shapiro?



By Dan Wetzel, Yahoo! Sports 12 hours, 40 minutes ago

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KEARNY,
N.J. —
Nevin
Shapiro
once lived
in a \$6.1
million,
6,432-
square foot
mansion on
North Bay
Road in
Miami
Beach. It
came
complete
with views
of Biscayne
Bay and the
Miami
skyline
from the Spanish-themed pool.



If he grew bored with that, he'd take out his \$1.6 million Riviera yacht. Or just hit his usual South Beach haunts — Prime 112 or Mansion nightclub or the Mercury Hotel, where he occasionally threw wild, hooker-fueled parties. On more casual days maybe he'd hang out with a local celebrity such as Shaquille O'Neal, Dwyane Wade or any number of current or former Miami Hurricanes, the program he once loved and now may destroy.

In the mid-2000s, amidst the decadence and fake money of the Miami real estate boom, Nevin Shapiro became the unlikely king of South Beach, the epitome of consumption at all costs. He chased status, celebrity and cash. And Shapiro's favorite extravagance came in the millions of dollars he said he spent on athletes at the University of Miami, the largest known lavishing of

extra benefits in college athletics history.

"I was the fastest guy in the fastest town," Shapiro said.

On this day last February he's sitting inside a small, concrete meeting room of the Hudson County (N.J.) Correctional Center. He wears dull green prison garb. Upstairs he shares a cramped cell with a bank robber. He fears that when he returns to his tier he'll run into a fellow prisoner so intent on fighting him that it can't be avoided. Even if he wins, he'll get sent to solitary.

He barely eats in an effort to avoid gaining weight on his 5-foot-5 frame. Last winter, he went more than four months without stepping outside, even into the prison yard; drawing not a single breath of fresh air. In June, he was transferred to a detention center in Brooklyn, where on the high security eighth floor he shared one big room, just rows of bunk beds with 120 murderers, terrorists and the other assorted worst of the worst.



"People who say I should go to hell, well, I'm here," Shapiro, now 42, said.

[Y! Sports probe: Miami booster spells out illicit benefits to players]

There is no lack of people who say such a thing. Shapiro pled guilty in September 2010 to running a \$930 million Ponzi scheme that cost investors \$82.7 million. Shapiro said he "never set out to rip people off," it just turned into fraud when his real estate business collapsed.

His plea agreement says otherwise. He financially crushed investors, including some retirees. He's no sympathetic figure. He's been sentenced to 20 years in prison. He's currently in the process of being transferred to a more hospitable federal facility outside Miami, yet even with that improvement the mere thought of a lengthy sentence is almost too much to bear.

In more than eight months of communicating with him, whether during lengthy in-person visits, over the phone or through email and letters, he's vacillates between depressed, disgusted and at times suicidal. In an instant he can go from pacing with anger around a meeting room like a caged animal to slumping back in a chair despondent at his fate. The good moments are fleeting.



"If I died, I wouldn't be upset," he said. "Sometimes I float outside my body, look back down and say, 'I can't believe I'm in prison. I can't believe this is my life.' "

It's from this state of mind that a rage was born.

Nevin Shapiro knows exactly what he's doing in ratting out the Miami athletic department and dozens of players and coaches he aided through the years. He knows the stakes of these tales of payouts to athletes, illegal recruiting meetings and hush-hush deals with coaches eager to tap his cash and connections.

His admission of eviscerating the NCAA rulebook with either the clear or tacit knowledge of so

many Miami leaders will create one of the biggest scandals in college sports history. Last March he chose to contact the NCAA by mail. By May, enforcement staffers, with a court reporter in tow, were spending days hearing his testimony and sorting through his documented proof. On Monday they hit the U of M campus in Coral Gables.

As Shapiro tells it, for much of the 2000s Miami football was a de facto professional team and he was the owner. He said the NCAA investigators he's been working with have compared it to the 1986 case against Southern Methodist, which led to the only "death penalty" punishment in history.

"They said it's the biggest thing they've ever seen," Shapiro said.

The NCAA cited its policy of declining comment on any potential investigation.

Why's he doing it? Why is one of the most passionate Miami fans willing to kill Miami? Because he's in here, his old friends (players, coaches, administrators) are out there and almost none of them will take his call anymore.

[Related: Why Miami should have foreseen problems]

Let there be no mistake about his motivation to talk – he's bitter and wants to inflict pain anyway he can.

They were once his friends, he said. They were once eager to accept his help out of trouble, drink his booze and fish off his boat. Now they won't acknowledge him. They won't help him. They won't support him, financially, emotionally or anything else. He's threatened some of them that he'd bring this story to light if they didn't step up, a move some will consider extortion or blackmail.

Shapiro doesn't care. He can't be hurt any more than he already is.

"We always said we were family," Shapiro said. "Be consistent with me. Don't take my money when you need help and then turn your back when I need help. This is what boys do for each other."

So he sits in this hellhole and it all boils over.

"[Expletive] them," he spits.

This is vengeance born from desperation.

"[Expletive], [expletive], [expletive], [expletive] them."

Hell hath no fury like a one-time rich guy on the Alpha 5-East tier.

What do you want to happen to Miami football, Shapiro is asked in one of his calmer moments? The actions he's detailed should create devastating consequences for the program.

"That particular question is a tough one to answer," he said. "I'm really at a crossroads with my conscience. Obviously I am affecting a lot of people and [an] outlet for their joy – and I know that because I felt that way about Miami football. I lived it.

"But I just can't get past the fact these players turned their nose at me. I just want the story to be out there. What happens then, I can't control. I really need to close this chapter of my life. It's painful."

When it came to Hurricane players, Shapiro said he hosted opulent parties, handed over payouts, even set up his own professional sports agency to represent his friends, all while coaches, staffers and administrators either knew or should have known. Shapiro provided

years of credit card statements, bank records, phone bills, emails and thousands of photos. Yahoo! Sports tracked down dozens of corroborating witnesses to back up his claims.

Shapiro was the program's sugar daddy, nicknamed "Lil' Luke" by Canes players because his largesse – not physical stature – matched the infamous Miami fan and hip-hop star Luther Campbell.

It was a title Shapiro basked in. He didn't just routinely host Campbell at his luxury box at Land Shark Stadium. He even kept up Campbell's tradition of offering cash bounties of up to \$1,000 to Canes players who knocked certain opponents out of games with injuries.

For all the ugliness, Shapiro has a natural gift for gab and a convincing, likeable, overwhelming personality. He's a smart guy. He's funny. He didn't draw in all those sucker investors by accident.

Brooklyn born, he grew up in a middle-class home in Miami Beach, raised mostly by a single mother after a divorce. His stepfather was himself later busted for participating in a multi-million dollar fraud.

He attended the University of South Florida but never lost his boyhood allegiance to the Hurricanes, who he followed as a kid.

By the turn of the century Shapiro had started Capitol Investments USA, which bought expiring food at wholesale and shipped it to more lenient overseas markets at high prices. He ran it out of South Beach and soon used his relentless personality to befriend major money men who brought in more major money men, all seeking to invest in his business. He promised sizeable interest payments, between 10 and 26 percent, according to federal authorities.

By 2009, it all began to crack. The grocery business was barely operating. Federal prosecutors would later allege in court documents that starting in 2005, it "had virtually no income-generating business" and "in fact, Capitol conducted virtually no legitimate business transactions." Old investors had to be paid with new investors, a classic Ponzi scheme. Coupled with the collapse of the South Florida real estate market, everything fell apart. Shapiro survived through the year almost exclusively on his ability to hold off investors who sensed trouble and openly asked him if he was a Bernie Madoff-type.

The feds alleged in court documents Shapiro used the millions to fund his lavish lifestyle. On April 21, 2010, Shapiro flew to New Jersey and self-surrendered to authorities. He expected to post bail and return to Florida. Instead he went in and hasn't seen a moment of freedom since.

"Nevin Shapiro used other people's money to live a fantasy life built on false promises to unsuspecting victims," U.S. Attorney Paul J. Fishman said.

Shapiro spent like the money would never run out. He had every conceivable toy. He spent \$400,000 for floor seats to the Miami Heat. He said he gambled more than \$5 million on sports, including huge sums on the Hurricanes. He ate at the finest restaurants, drank in VIP rooms till dawn and hosted huge poolside, celebrity-rich parties at his home. He loved the working girls, the strippers and hookers who provided an extra dash to his gatherings. He never married and never had any children. Even into his late 30s he saw nothing unusual about partying with college kids.

The Miami NewTimes dubbed him the city's "Caligula" and pegged him as South Beach's own Jay Gatsby.

Nothing equaled his passion for the Hurricanes. He didn't just want to be a fan; he wanted to be the program.

He joked that he was the Canes chief recruiter and eventually assistant coaches just started bringing players and their parents over to his fabulous waterfront property or encouraged him to put them up in upscale Miami hotels.

He was a walking NCAA violation. Of all the laws he was breaking, the NCAA was the least of his worries. The guy is a world-class con man; he didn't fear some ivory tower infractions committee. "I never thought they'd catch me," he said. "And they never did."

He knew all along he was breaking the rules. He said everyone at Miami either did also or did everything they could to not know. They gladly took his money and put his name on a student lounge. They let him lead the team out of the tunnel – twice. They let him fly on the team plane for a road game. They gave him sideline access and honored him during games.

The players, meanwhile, counted on him for favors big and small, money here, help with the local cops there, or a decadent party to wrap it all up. Shapiro saw his friendships with the players as real. He gave advice. He picked them up when they were down. He bristles at the suggestion he was some star-struck "hanger-on."

Part of it is his massive ego. Part of it is, in the swirling party-circles of South Beach, he was actually as big of a figure as they.

"The hanger-on is an unfair quote," he said. "I got great joy seeing their success and seeing that success at a school I love. I can never be compared to a fan or a groupie."

"You have to realize who I was in South Beach at that time. I wasn't hanging out with them for celebrity; I was a celebrity. I wasn't calling them to go out; they were calling me. I wasn't looking to put liquor on their tab, to buy jewelry with their money; they were doing that to me."

What he saw as genuine, though, others apparently didn't. Little is real in South Beach, and even Shapiro, its ultimate creature, now understands it's "a fake life" even if, like some of his old investors, he can't come to grips with the idea that something he was led to believe was true actually wasn't.

Once the party ended, everyone went home and tried to forget the hangover. Many players did the wise thing and ran from a hard-partying criminal. Shapiro deeply believes all those old Hurricanes were wrong to abandon him. There's no convincing him otherwise.

Prison life is hard, frustrating and powerless. Shapiro, for all his faults, is an industrious go-getter. He once lived his life 100 miles an hour and, had he chosen, could have been a success on the honest side of the law. Now he is stalled out, surrounded by two-bit drug dealers, thugs and gang bangers.

And so here comes the revenge. He isn't afraid to admit his motivation – he wants to hurt the people who hurt him. It isn't a pretty sight. Shapiro can go on long rants about how this one player or that one administrator deserves particular shame. It often doesn't make sense.

He sits behind bars day after day after day, his rage growing, his frustrations mounting. Why won't they call him back? Why won't they send some money? Why won't they help? Where are the players, where are the administrators who once leaned on him for so much? Why won't anyone even pretend to care?

He simply won't allow himself to be played like that. He won't be cast away in some cage to die.

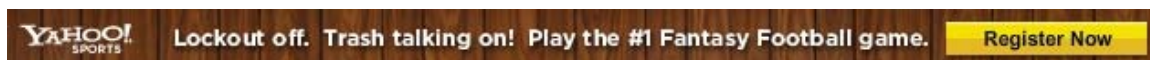
"It's bittersweet," he says during one prison visit. "These guys were my boys. Then they did me dirty."

On another visit, the sweetness is gone. He's just bitter.

“There’s a man’s code of ethics and that’s all out the window with the way these guys have responded to me.

“I could give a [expletive] what anybody says to me. I don’t give a [expletive], [expletive]. I could give a [expletive] what happens to that place.”

From deep behind bars, Nevin Shapiro roars.



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