

# On Donaghy's media appearances (part two)

As can be sensed by now, a review of his appearances discloses the same phenomenon *in re*: Donaghy simply repeating canned replies on a fairly small universe of topics (a tidy summary is here [see paragraph two]). You can plainly hear and see that he was an absolute machine in getting his message out – and that he benefited greatly from a mix of hosts who, at a minimum, ignored the public record (which had also been widely reported contemporaneous with key events). I'll have more on this latter point soon, but until then I thought I'd highlight a brilliant public relations strategy Donaghy (and/or his handlers at the time) employed.

You see, it wasn't simply that Donaghy was remarkably robotic and on-message (he'd be any political campaign manager's dream candidate in that regard), it was also the patterning of the questions which allowed him to weave a storyline that commonly ended with hosts and "interviewers" expressing sympathy and well wishes. Often, Donaghy's appearances looked or sounded something like this (paraphrasing his statements in my "quotes" below):

\* As evidence he didn't fix games on which he bet, Donaghy would say, "I did not fix games by making incorrect calls to influence outcomes to facilitate my bets. If I was doing that, I'd be throwing up red flags all over the place and I would have been detected even sooner than I was."

\* In response to the predictable (if not explicitly scripted) question, "Why should we believe you?", Donaghy would typically reply, "Because the FBI conducted a thorough investigation, as did the NBA, and they concluded I did not make any calls to influence these bets."

\* If the above wasn't sufficient enough to establish Donaghy's credibility, he often said something like, "The FBI supports

the book” or “The FBI stands behind the book”.

\* On the (extremely rare) occasion a host pointed to ESPN’s TrueHoop host Henry Abbott’s research (see, e.g., [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)) which quite seriously called into question several of Donaghy’s assertions (and which, until now, was the most comprehensive critique of Donaghy’s overall situation), Donaghy would attempt to discredit Abbott’s work by arguing it was a biased result of research done on behalf of the NBA because the league has a significant business relationship with ESPN. [I must admit I have never understood Donaghy’s argument in this regard, since Abbott was among the most substantive and equally damning when it came to the issue of whether Donaghy had ever been cleared by the FBI or the NBA *in re*: fixing games, and indeed had posted interviews (see, e.g., [here](#) and [here](#)) with pro gambler Haralabob Voulgaris, who openly stated he firmly believed Donaghy fixed games. Thus, to me Donaghy makes little sense when he says ESPN is out to get him on behalf of the NBA. After all, the NBA almost certainly has no interest in someone – much less the influential sports network – promoting the idea that Donaghy may very well have fixed games – especially after the league conducted its own “study“, the one Donaghy loves to cite so much as clearing him of fixing games!]

With Donaghy’s confessed and alleged criminal activity out of the way (often in brusque fashion), typically complete with his credibility intact, the “interviews” moved onto topics or themes that painted Donaghy as both victim and hero.

\* Donaghy commonly got into his rant about the NBA’s alleged culture (of biases and corruption) of which he was, in his view, a bit part. In short order, the Donaghy appearance would thus move from his actions to those of others (referees, league officials, etc). Importantly, it was often at this point of Donaghy’s appearances that he shrewdly employed two time-tested public relations strategies within a sentence or two:

1) Donaghy would ingratiate himself with his audience by saying how “smart” or “knowledgeable” they were (ala politicians who so often say, “The American people are smart...”), including taking the time and effort to make it personal by naming the market/town/city in which he was appearing (i.e., “The NBA fans, especially in a city like Dallas, are very, very knowledgeable...”); and

2) Donaghy would use a speaking tactic that exploits a cognitive phenomenon known as “confirmation bias” by saying something like, “Ask the fans if I was a lone, rogue referee because they know they have seen a lot of unusual things over the past ten or fifteen years” (alluding to pre-existing and well-known conspiracy theories which argue the league conspires, by various means, to feature certain players and/or teams and certain playoff/championship matchups, all with the league’s financial coffers in mind). [Note: Confirmation bias is defined as “a tendency to search for or interpret information in a way that confirms one’s preconceptions” – often at the expense of evidence, however valid and substantial, that does not support one’s preconceptions.]

The takeaway is therefore that rather than being treated as a common criminal who simply and shrewdly defrauded his former employer for his own personal gain, Donaghy is to be heralded as a whistle-blower exposing corrupt practices within – and institutionalized by – his former organization.

Donaghy’s appearances almost always ended with a combination of discussions that had the collective effect of painting Donaghy as a sympathetic figure who was fighting multiple battles. For example, the following themes were commonly explored as his “interviews” concluded.

\* Donaghy claimed he was beaten in prison by “someone claiming he was associated with the New York mob,” which was likely because he was a “cooperator for the government”. Related to this...

\* Donaghy claimed he is now frequently “in contact with the

FBI, who say they have people within these organizations and if they hear anything they'll let me know..." (implying that Donaghy has something to fear from organized criminals). Please revisit my comments in part one of this review and elsewhere about Donaghy's "mob" claims.

\* Donaghy claimed he bet on NBA games not because of greed or a want for money but rather because of the addictive rush of gambling. Indeed, so great was his addiction that not only cost him his job and his freedom, it cost him his marriage. For the purposes of this analysis, readers must take Donaghy at his word that it was his gambling addiction and not his other alleged behaviors (including those discussed in *Gaming the Game* and elsewhere [also see, especially, here]) that caused his wife to seek a divorce.

\* Donaghy commonly said, as with numerous Donaghy assertions without a shred of supporting evidence, the NBA was trying to suppress him from telling his story – including intimidating his first publisher and attempting to influence CBS in re: Donaghy's appearance on the network's *60 Minutes* program.

In sum, Donaghy says he was a guy who was: fighting the mob, fighting the NBA, fighting ESPN, and fighting his addiction. Far from a more simple tale of manipulation, deceit, avarice and malevolence, this was instead an inspiring story of victimhood, addiction, recovery, and redemption. As such, Donaghy says he wrote his book – and will continue to do related appearances – because "friends, family, and even law enforcement officials" have told him he has an "important message" to spread.

With this unbelievably predictable template in mind, combined with the requisite unprepared hosts, you can see how Donaghy's appearances so frequently ended like this (and why I stopped treating them as newsworthy long ago):