

Georgetown Dad Admits He Paid \$400,000 for Son's Admission

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- Bribe part of plot to admit Semprevivo's son as tennis recruit
 - Semprevivo seemed to smell a setup; coach pleaded not guilty
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Stephen Semprevivo *Photographer: Scott Eisen/Bloomberg*

A Los Angeles executive became the third parent to plead guilty in the U.S. college-admissions scandal, saying he paid a \$400,000 bribe to get his son into [Georgetown University](#) with a falsified profile as a tennis recruit.

Stephen Semprevivo, who has served as chief strategy and growth officer at [Cydcor LLC](#),

admitted in federal court in Boston on Tuesday that his son didn't even play competitive tennis. Semprevivo is one of 33 parents caught up in the biggest college-admissions scam the Justice Department has ever prosecuted.

U.S. District Judge Indira Talwani asked Semprevivo whether he understood she had “the power to give you a term of imprisonment up to 20 years” on the single count of mail fraud conspiracy facing him, even though prosecutors said they'd recommend 18 months because he had accepted responsibility for his crime.

“Yes, your honor,” Semprevivo replied.

“You understand you will not be able to withdraw your plea of guilty if your sentence is not what you expected?” the judge asked.

“Yes, your honor,” he said.

Cydcor, which offers outsourced sales services, said Semprevivo's employment has been terminated in light of his guilty plea.

“These charges against Stephen Semprevivo stem from a personal matter and do not involve Cydcor, nor his work with our company,” said Gail Michalak, a company spokeswoman.

Parents One and Two

The U.S. claims the parents paid a total of \$25 million to bribe coaches or for ringleader William Singer's test-taking surrogate to ace the SAT or ACT college-entrance exam for their children, or both, funneling some payments through a charity he ran. Singer has pleaded guilty and cooperated with the government, secretly recording conversations with clients -- including one in which Semprevivo appears to suspect he's being set up.

Bruce and Davina Isackson, who are cooperating with the government in its continuing investigation of the racket, were the first parents to plead guilty, admitting they paid at least \$600,000 to get their daughters into USC and UCLA.

Among 14 parents who agreed to plead guilty, including the Isacksons and Semprevivo, the actor Felicity Huffman and Gordon Caplan, who left his post as co-chairman of the law firm Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP after he was charged, are due in court soon to enter their pleas -- Huffman on Monday and Caplan on May 21. Both have issued apologies. Caplan said in a statement in April that his daughter "had no knowledge whatsoever about my actions, has been devastated to learn what I did and has been hurt the most by it."

Semprevivo's sentencing is set for Sept. 11.

None of the colleges themselves, or the applicants, have been charged.

Dictating Essay

In 2015, Singer had Semprevivo's son write to Gordon Ernst, then the coach of Georgetown's men's tennis team, pretending to have played tennis competitively through all four years of high school, to be an Academic All American in both tennis and basketball, and to belong to the Nike Federation All Academic Athletic Team in tennis, prosecutors claim. They say Ernst, who has pleaded not guilty, was in on the plot.

Singer even dictated what Semprevivo's son should say in his essay for Georgetown, prosecutors said.

"When I walk into a room, people will normally look up and make a comment about my

height -- I'm 6'5 -- and ask me if I play basketball," the applicant wrote, according to court documents. "With a smile, I nod my head, but also insist that the sport I put my most energy into is tennis."

After he was admitted, his family's trust sent a \$400,000 check as a "private contribution" to Singer's charity. Singer then made "numerous payments" to Ernst totaling \$950,000, including payments for Semprevivo's son and the children of other clients, according to the government's criminal complaint against Semprevivo.

Sensing a Setup?

Semprevivo's son, who enrolled at Georgetown in the fall of 2016, never joined the tennis team, according to the government.

Meghan Dubyak, a spokeswoman for Georgetown, said that while the university doesn't comment on individual students, knowingly misrepresenting or falsifying credentials can be grounds for rescinding a student's admission to the school and result in dismissal.

"We have reviewed all available information related to Mr. Ernst's alleged fraudulent actions, contacted current students who may have been implicated, and given them opportunity to respond," Dubyak said. "Each student case is being addressed individually and appropriate actions are being taken."

Semprevivo appears to be one of the parents Singer recorded whose conversations suggested they suspected they were being set up. To fulfill his cooperation deal, he went back to his clients, sometimes long after serving them, on a pretext to get them talking about the scam.

In a phone call with Semprevivo in March, Singer fished for something more incriminating than he was able to get in a December call. Semprevivo hung up and then called back with remarks that might have offered him some cover. According to an FBI transcript, he said Singer had to be "accountable."

"I'm totally accountable that I got him in through tennis and that you guys were aware of it," Singer replied. "That I used my relationship and made [Semprevivo's son] a tennis player."

“You know, I don’t have any details,” Semprevivo said, according to the transcript, and went on to say “there were two separate things,” that he “donated as a charity” and “if you’re trying to turn something around in terms of, you know, what you did and how you did it, then I don’t want to be, I don’t want to be a part of that.”

Tension Over Deal

Semprevivo’s plea deal looked like it might break down at one point in Tuesday’s hearing. Federal prosecutors said restitution it has sought on behalf of Georgetown for its legal expenses in responding to the probe hadn’t been figured. Yet as part of the deal, Semprevivo was waiving his right to appeal that restitution.

“Essentially what you’re saying is there would be a blank check,” Talwani said.

In the end, the lawyers conferred, Semprevivo’s attorney David Kenner said the deal was in his client’s best interest, and Talwani accepted it.

Ernst left Georgetown in 2017, joined the University of Rhode Island as its women’s tennis coach and left that post after he was charged in the case.

Former coaches at schools including the University of Southern California, Stanford University and Yale University have been charged in the scheme.

Including parents, coaches, test center staff and others, a total of 50 people have been charged.

(Updates with Cydcor comment in seventh paragraph.)

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