

NBA dirt charges true, Gambino squad vet says

BY JOHN MARZULLI

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Retired FBI Agent Philip Scala stands outside Sparks Steak House, where he had rushed to scene (below) when Gambino boss Paul Castellano was gunned down in 1985. (WARGA/NEWS)

The man who put away [John Gotti](#), baby-sat Sammy (Bull) Gravano, raided an [Al Qaeda](#) bomb factory and helped uncover the [NBA](#) betting scandal says [Tim Donaghy](#) told the truth.

[Philip Scala](#), the recently retired [FBI](#) supervisory special agent in charge of the Gambino squad, which uncovered Donaghy's scheme of betting on basketball games he had officiated, said he believes the disgraced referee's claims that other refs were dirty.

Scala, one of the most respected law enforcement officials in the metropolitan area and a tower of integrity in the bureau, spoke exclusively with the Daily News about his storied career.

Donaghy, one of the most infamous turncoats he handled, came under withering criticism from the NBA for his allegations that other referees fixed the outcome of games.

"He was as emotional and remorseful as I've ever seen a cooperator," Scala said, just days after Donaghy was sentenced to 15 months in jail. "In the course of my relationship with him, I had the insight that he was intent on repaying his debt to society, restoring his family's faith in him and trying to make something better out of his life."

Donaghy and his lawyer went to the government last year as soon as he learned the feds were on to him. He was subjected to grueling debriefings, then the feds set out to corroborate his claims by interviewing scores of people, including other referees.

But when prosecutors wrote a letter to the federal judge outlining Donaghy's cooperation, defense lawyer [John Lauro](#) was outraged that the information about other NBA referees and officials had been omitted simply because no criminal charges were brought.

"Donaghy, for some reason, looked up to me," Scala said. "He came to me one day and said, 'It means a lot to me if you could answer this question: Do you believe that I've told the truth?' I told him, 'I believe you.'"



Retired FBI Agent Philip Scala stands outside Sparks Steak House, where he had rushed to scene (below) when Gambino boss Paul Castellano was gunned down in 1985. (MONASTER/NEWS)

"I wanted to know why he was asking, and he said, 'I'd appreciate it if you'd call my dad' - and I did that for him," Scala said.

Donaghy's father, Jerry, a retired college basketball referee, also wanted to know if the FBI agent believed his son was telling the truth about everything.

Scala said he was not merely offering his opinion of the disgraced referee, rather it was his informed assessment of his credibility after his unit - officially known as C-16 - conducted an exhaustive investigation.

"Donaghy told us the truth. [Sammy Gravano](#) told the truth; [Mikey Scars](#) (Gambino capo Michael DiLeonardo) told the truth," Scala said referring to some of his infamous Mafia rats. "That doesn't mean everything they said ends up in an indictment."

Scala, 58, fit, dapper and sporting a salt-and-pepper beard and mustache, has put together a consulting firm called Pathfinder that is collecting information about corruption in professional sports.

He brings to the table nearly three decades of investigative experience spanning Gotti's assassination of Gambino boss [Paul Castellano](#), the 1993 raid on an Al Qaeda bomb factory in [Queens](#) that earned him a citation for bravery and the takedown of 62 gangsters last February on racketeering charges.

Scala, the son of a baker, grew up in [Ozone Park](#), where his parents instilled the core values of hard work, sacrifice and earning an honest

dollar.

He attended [Archbishop Molloy High School](#) and later earned a master's degree in psychology from [New York University](#) and another in business from St. John's.

His e-mail address includes the word "tough," but the soft-spoken Scala is a devout Catholic who attends Mass daily and opines on Aristotle's perspective on a life in balance: "Stupidity and cowardice are the extremes; the center is virtue and heroic bravery."

"My belief is there's good in everyone," he said. "But I have been in contact with some people who became evil incarnate."



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Scala won't name the two or three folks in that hellish category, in part because one remains on the street. He remains tight-lipped on many subjects because he still retains "top secret" clearance from the government for consulting work.

There will be some good war stories in a book he's working on, though. Here's one: After Gravano stunned the underworld by defecting, Scala was assigned to guard the prize witness in a hotel room on [Governors Island](#).

"We were watching TV and there was a piece on the nightly news about [Jeffrey Dahmer](#)," Scala recalled. "Sammy said, 'Look at this sick bastard,' and an agent said to him: 'Sammy, you killed 19 people.'" The glib Gravano got the last word: "You can't compare me to Dahmer; what I did was business."

The December 1985 night Castellano was gunned down in front of Sparks restaurant in midtown, Scala raced from his home in Queens to the scene where the powerful mobster lay dead in the gutter.

The renegade killing of a boss without the permission of the leaders of the four other mob families was a "watershed" event, Scala said.

Gravano solved the Castellano murder case against Gotti, and opened the floodgates for powerful turncoats as never before.

Like Donaghy, DiLeonardo, a former capo and close friend of John A. (Junior) Gotti who has started a new life in the witness protection program, also left an impression on Scala.

"I have respect for him now; not for him in his dark days," Scala said of DiLeonardo. "Redemption is possible, but some people need to spend the rest of their days in jail."

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