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# The fix is in

by Vince Darcangelo ([buzz@boulderweekly.com](mailto:buzz@boulderweekly.com))

It's a common response, uttered at least once a game at every sports bar. One of the refs makes an obviously bad call; a usually sure-handed receiver makes a significant and untimely drop; a fleet-footed defensive back stumbles while in man coverage; a strong-armed offensive tackle becomes a turnstile on a pivotal third-down play. Coincidence?

No way, shout the losers. Someone was obviously paid to take a dive.

Well, for the most part there's not much credibility to poor-loser cries of fixed games—especially in football where so many different players are involved in the game. Not since Northwestern tailback Dennis Lundy intentionally fumbled at the goal line in 1994 to cover the point spread has there been a point-shaving scandal concerning football. And the fact is professional athletes make too much money to be bought off. But through the use of extortion or other means, is it possible for someone to fix a football game? A Super Bowl? An entire season?

This is the subject of former Bronco Reggie Rivers' new novel, 4th and Fixed, a fictional mystery that draws heavily from his six years playing experience in the NFL.

"None of the things in the book are things that I actually saw," says Rivers, the former Broncos fullback and special-teams standout. "As I was trying to write this book and starting to think up scenarios, I just thought about everything that I had seen in my career that would lend itself to somebody trying to fix a game."

The inspiration for 4th and Fixed, which concerns two talented thugs who attempt to fix the entire season for a fictional San Antonio football team, was the very real NFL Security—a team of former FBI agents who specialized in organized crime who now work for the NFL to monitor gambling and ensure the legitimacy of the sport.

"They watch the local betting line, they talk to bookies on the street, they have a relationship with casinos, they're watching the players, the coaches, everything," says Rivers. "Their sole job is to make sure that nobody can fix a game in the NFL. The more I learned about NFL Security, the more I wondered, from the standpoint of a novel, 'Well, what if you had a couple of wiseguys who figured out how to get around that?' and that was the impetus for the book."

Citing a recent survey that stated 2.4 percent of Division I college

football players have reported being approached to fix games, Rivers says he thinks pro football players have been as well.

"If it's true that [college players] are being approached, then there has to be some percentage—even if it's just a fraction of 1 percent—of NFL players, over the course of a decade, who get approached," he says.

Of course, this doesn't mean that the player goes through with throwing the game, but Rivers says this is not beyond the realm of possibility. And the fact that we haven't heard about it from the league doesn't necessarily mean it hasn't happened.

"Over the past 30 years we've heard about players who've been charged with murder, players who beat their wives, players who drive drunk, players who've been suspended by the league for using drugs. But you never hear about anybody being suspended for trying to fix a game, accepting money for fixing a game, anything like that," says Rivers. "So there's two possibilities. One possibility is that this is the one rule the league has that no player ever violates. They violate all the rest, but not this one. Or these things happen, but the league doesn't send out a press release because that would undermine the integrity of the game. I think they deal with these things quietly, and that's why we never hear about it."

Rivers' experience with the NFL lends credence to the plot of *4th and Fixed* that keeps the reader guessing how much is actually fiction and how much, if not based on actual past events, could occur in the future. (It will certainly give fans something to consider the next time their favorite team takes a late-season nosedive.) But while Rivers maintains that the criminal events in *4th and Fixed* are purely fictional, the supporting character of Robo—a smart-dressing, wise-cracking motormouth—is wholly based on a former teammate most Denver fans remember fondly.

"Robo is definitely Shannon Sharpe," Rivers laughs. "Shannon is by far one of the funniest human beings that I've ever known. So when I was writing that character, I'd say half the things that Robo says are things that came straight out of Shannon's mouth."

And as anyone who's seen or read a Shannon Sharpe interview would know: You just can't make that stuff up.

Reggie Rivers will read and sign *4th and Fixed* at 3 p.m., Sunday, Nov. 14, at the Denver Book Mall, 32 Broadway, Denver, 303-733-3808.

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