

# Football Program Rocked by Cellular Phone Fraud Scandal

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A probe of illegal cellular phone usage led Secret Service agents to search the UCF football locker room Tuesday afternoon. The agents were on the trail of evidence linking several UCF football players to the use of illegal cellular phone numbers.

Tuesday evening agents arrested Patrick Brinson, a former member of the Golden Knights who left the team after incurring an injury.

Brinson is accused of possessing at least 15 cellular phones and programming them with illegal telephone numbers.

According to an affidavit by Secret Service agent John Mrha, programming phones with illegal numbers, "would allow an individual to have free, but unauthorized, cellular telephone service." Four of the phones in question were found during the locker room search.

Brinson was released Wednesday morning after spending a night in the Seminole County Jail. A federal grand jury is set to consider the case within 20 days according to Brinson's court-appointed public defender.

Besides Brinson, 11 other football players were named in the search warrant as players who had made calls on unauthorized cellular numbers. However, only Brinson has been arrested.

Following the execution of the search warrant, UCF head coach Gene McDowell offered his view of the investigation.

"Federal law enforcement is trying to kill a fly with an ax, and they've done it," McDowell said. "Pat Brinson, an AT&T representative, sold phones to my players. And half of the guys I've interviewed did no more than borrow somebody else's phone. Who hasn't done that?"

According to published reports, players paid Brinson between \$30-\$100 for use of cellular telephones for two to five weeks each.

McDowell met with officials in the Federal Courthouse Thursday and that he, "agreed with the US Attorney's Office not to discuss this in the press until all this is completed."

The investigation, requested by AT&T Wireless Services, began in September when a wiretap was authorized on a phone using a number not registered in the AT&T data base. According to a Secret Service affidavit, Brinson, was identified as the phone's user.

During the course of the investigation, agents discovered that seven of 36 unregistered cellular phone numbers were used in Lincoln, Nebraska during the time the Golden Knights were in town for a game against the Cornhuskers. According to the affidavit, at least 17 of the numbers were activated using Brinson's password.

AT&T Wireless Services has also fired a woman who they believe assisted Brinson in committing the fraud.

An AT&T Wireless spokesman estimates that the company lost \$30,000 in unbilled airtime as a result of the scam.

Nationally, cellular phone fraud costs the industry around \$650 million a year. The end result of cellular phone fraud according to one company spokesman is higher rates for consumers.

The University is conducting its own investigation into the matter. Although no players had been suspended from the team prior to Saturday's game, McDowell alluded to the possibility of future suspensions, pending the outcome of the investigation, during his weekly radio show Thursday on 540 The Team.

"Probably about seven guys could be in trouble, and probably only half of them will actually get in trouble," McDowell said.