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Admissions scandal: David Sidoo, former Canadian football player, sentenced to 90 days in prison



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David Sidoo leaves federal court in Boston after a March 2019 hearing. (Jonathan Wiggs / Associated Press)

By MATTHEW ORMSETH | STAFF WRITER

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David Sidoo, whose career as a professional football player, stockbroker and venture capitalist has been overshadowed by the revelation he paid \$200,000 to fix his sons' college entrance exams, was sentenced Wednesday to 90 days in prison.

Sidoo, a Canadian citizen who lives in Vancouver, pleaded guilty in March to a single count of conspiring with William “Rick” Singer, the Newport Beach consultant at the center of the admissions scandal, to rig his two sons' SAT entrance exams. Federal prosecutors dropped a money-laundering charge against him in exchange for Sidoo acknowledging he'd committed fraud.

Sidoo is one of 28 parents charged by the U.S. attorney's office in Boston to have acknowledged their guilt. Another 10 have maintained their innocence and are moving toward a pair of trials, the first of which is scheduled to begin Oct. 5 in Boston. The case's highest-profile defendants — actress Lori Loughlin and her fashion designer husband, Mossimo Giannulli — pleaded guilty in May and were slated to be sentenced on Aug. 21.

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“I hope that in time, people will not judge me for the worst moment in my life,” he said.

U.S. District Judge Nathaniel M. Gorton, ruling from Boston by videoconference, said he was “appalled” that Sidoo, a respected businessman and philanthropist, was standing before him to be sentenced for a felony. Sidoo was undeniably generous and had mentored many young people, the judge said, and yet in conspiring with Singer, he had “displayed an unbelievable lack of morality, integrity and common sense.”

Gorton ordered Sidoo to report to prison on Sept. 23. In addition to serving his prison term, Sidoo must pay a \$250,000 fine.

In a series of indictments and other documents filed in court, prosecutors described how Sidoo worked with Singer to fix his sons’ exams and falsify their college applications. His criminal conduct was prolonged and “not a one-off lapse in judgment,” Justin D. O’Connell, an assistant U.S. attorney, said during the sentencing hearing.

In 2011, Mark Riddell, Singer’s Harv

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Singer and Riddell have each pleaded guilty to several felonies and have yet to be sentenced.

Riddell would return to Vancouver to take the boy's high school graduation exams, the indictment said. Sidoo's son was admitted to Chapman University in Orange and later transferred to USC, prosecutors wrote in the memo.

In 2012, Riddell took the SAT for Sidoo's younger son. Because the boy hadn't previously taken the test, Riddell scored a 2280 out of 2400, and Sidoo paid Singer another \$100,000, according to the indictment.

Singer also drafted an essay, brimming with falsehoods, that Sidoo's son submitted to several schools, the indictment said. An early draft described the boy being held at gunpoint by a Los Angeles street gang, only to be rescued by a rival gang member named "Nugget," Eric S. Rosen, an assistant U.S. attorney, wrote in a memo.

When Singer emailed the draft to Sidoo, he wrote back, "Can we lessen the interaction with the gangs. Guns....? That's scary stuff." The final draft made no mention of guns, the indictment said.

Sidoo's younger son was admitted to UC Berkeley.

Several years later, Sidoo and Singer discussed having Riddell take either the GMAT, for admission to an MBA program, or the LSAT for law school on behalf of his older son, according to the indictment. Riddell was also accused of obtaining a software license from a supplier in China, but

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Sidoo had already been punished to a certain degree, Weinberg wrote: His reputation has been tarnished, his awards have been revoked, his board seats relinquished and his name removed from the football stadium of his alma mater, the University of British Columbia.

Sidoo played six seasons in the Canadian Football League as a defensive back for the Saskatchewan Roughriders and British Columbia Lions, according to the British Columbia Sports Hall of Fame, into which Sidoo was inducted in 2017.

Dozens of Sidoo's friends and business associates submitted letters to Gorton, the judge, attesting to his good deeds and remorse for his admitted crimes. Among them was a letter written by Warren Moon, the Hall of Fame quarterback who played for the Houston Oilers, among other teams.

Although he competed against Sidoo in the Canadian Football League in the 1980s, Moon didn't get to know Sidoo until three decades later, when an AAU basketball coach introduced the two, he wrote. "We both care deeply for young people, sports and education," Moon said.

Sidoo funded 40 scholarships — \$200,000 in all — to help kids go to college or pursue other post-high school education, Moon wrote. Sidoo served as a mentor to many of them. "His passion and his presence have a value that doesn't have a price tag," Moon said.

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Matthew Ormseth is a reporter for the Los Angeles Times. Before joining The Times in 2018, he covered city news and state politics at the Hartford Courant. He grew up in Arcadia and graduated from Cornell University.

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