

He pursues fraud with tenacity of linebacker

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Chris Madel swears he had no idea what the acronym BCS meant when got the job of investigating potentially illegal activities at the Fiesta Bowl, an Arizona nonprofit that hosted this year's title game of college football's Bowl Championship Series.

"I told the board that I didn't really care anything about college football," Madel said. "They thought that was funny."

What Madel cares about is fraud. Often, he's working for people or companies accused of committing it or other crimes. But the Minneapolis attorney has also earned a growing national profile as the lawyer companies and organizations turn to when they think they're being ripped off by their own senior executives.

We're not talking about personal use of printer paper, or penny-ante padding of corporate expense accounts. We're talking arrogance and assumed privilege on a grand scale. Madel and six colleagues at Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi documented plenty of it in Arizona.

The Fiesta Bowl's top executives helped funnel likely illegal political contributions, expensed trips to high-end strip clubs, and even paid for employee travel to another employee's out-of-town wedding because, in the words of Fiesta Bowl CEO John Junker, "We viewed the wedding as, essentially an affair of state — albeit on a non-royal scale."

Apparently, the regal treatment was reserved for things like for Junker's own 50th birthday party, a four-day, \$33,000 celebration at Pebble Beach golf resort in California; or for flying 11 Arizona legislators and their family members to a football game in Boston. On that \$65,674.58 trip, no expense — "\$3.19, Dunkin' Donuts" — was too small.

Colleagues say the 44-year-old Madel, a Waseca native who began his career as a trial attorney at the antitrust division of the U.S. Department of Justice in

Washington, D.C., has a gift for ferreting out the truth, even from people who have nothing to gain by revealing it.

He helped Best Buy uncover a kick-back scheme involving a supplier and one of its own executives, Robert Bossany, that cost the company an estimated \$32.8 million. Bossany was sentenced to prison for 7 1/2 years.

Earlier in his career, Madel led an internal investigation at Bloomington-based Katun Corp. that uncovered alleged violations of Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, mail-fraud statutes, wire-fraud statutes, illegal campaign contributions, computer fraud, tax and other crimes by current and former top executives. Katun's founder and former CEO, Terence Clarke, received a two-year prison sentence after pleading guilty to four counts of filing false tax returns.

"When you ask questions and probe for information, there is a skill that some people have and some people don't," said Thomas Brever, a Minneapolis area attorney who specializes in civil and criminal financial cases. "Chris is a master at it."

The Fiesta Bowl is a civic institution in Arizona. In addition to putting on the Insight Bowl and the Fiesta Bowl each year, it hosts the BCS championship game every four years. It sponsors 40 statewide events a year and donates money to other nonprofit organizations throughout Arizona. Given the economic impact — estimated at \$400 million in 2007 alone — it was big news in 2009 when the Arizona Republic first reported employees had been pressured by Junker and other Bowl executives to make contributions to specific politicians. The employees were subsequently reimbursed with sham bonus payments.

Junker denied the allegations, and a special investigation led by a former Arizona attorney general found no basis for the allegations. Nine months later, at the urging of some employees, a special committee of the Fiesta Bowl board commissioned a new investigation.

Madel's team spent more than five months digging through 55 gigabytes of

records and interviewing 50-plus employees, board members and former directors. The Fiesta Bowl agreed to pay the legal costs of any employee who agreed to meet with Madel, who conducted most of the interviews.

Lee Stein, a criminal defense attorney in Phoenix who represented 11 bowl employees, said Madel instantly earned the trust of his clients.

"He has a style that I'm not sure others could carry off," said Stein, a former government prosecutor. "He can be pretty chatty and funny and the conversation can get sidetracked, and I think it gets them relaxed. But he can also, at the same time, be extremely probing and zero in on tough subjects with very tough questions."

Madel's 276-page report has touched off a firestorm in Arizona and beyond. The bowl's board fired Junker and accepted the resignation of its chief operating officer and vice president of marketing. The state attorney general is conducting a criminal investigation.

Meanwhile, the BCS is weighing whether to drop the Fiesta Bowl from the national championship game rotation, and the NCAA will decide later this month whether to pull the nonprofit's operating license.

Madel credits the Fiesta Bowl's special committee for pursuing the investigation, even when his early reports to its members suggested things were much worse than anybody imagined.

"You could tell they wondered when it would ever end, but in the same breath they'd say, 'You've got to get to the bottom of this.'"



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