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## *They've Got Next: White Collar Fresh Face Robert Boone*

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Name: Robert Boone

Firm: Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP

Location: New York

Claim to Fame: As an assistant U.S. attorney in the Southern District of New York, he initiated and co-led a multiyear investigation and prosecution of an NCAA college basketball bribery scheme, leading to convictions of coaches, Adidas AG employees, financial advisers, and an aspiring agent.

Age: 39

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Robert Boone was an up-and-coming assistant U.S. attorney in the vaunted U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York about seven years ago, when he learned that an incomparable, highly sensitive case might be starting up that deeply resonated with him.

The line prosecutor and ardent sports fan was then a decade removed from playing NCAA Division I soccer at Howard University. Boone immediately informed his supervisor that he'd like to be considered for the assignment: Investigating a financial adviser's claims of having intel on a college basketball bribery scheme.

Boone landed the gig, becoming the first prosecutor on an investigation that would eventually become one of the most sweeping and consequential federal probes into college sports corruption.

He played a pivotal role on a Justice Department team that convicted 10 men, including assistant men's basketball coaches at Auburn University, the University of Southern California, the University of Arizona, and Oklahoma State University who accepted bribes from agents and advisers seeking to retain their athletes' as clients. Two of the defendants—an aspiring sports agent, Christian Dawkins, and an Adidas consultant, Merl Code, were found guilty by jury, with Boone co-leading the prosecution at trial.

“It’s not so often that you have a case that really overlaps with personal interest in the subject matter,” he said.

Boone, who left his assistant U.S. attorney job in October to become a partner at WilmerHale, looked back on the initial excitement of getting selected to work on the college bribery case. It occupied multiple years of his nearly 10-year government career in an office that frequently entrusted him with other high-profile matters.

He laughed off any comparison between NBA prospects and his own experience in a non-revenue-generating sport.

“I wasn’t as gifted as some of these players that were involved in the case, as victims of sorts, but I definitely could relate on some level of being young, being a college athlete, and just that period of your life,” he said.

He started the investigation by interviewing the government’s prime cooperator—a financial adviser providing information about potential corruption in college athletics while he was the target of an unconnected securities fraud case.

“It took a while for it to get to the point where there were people we felt we could charge,” Boone said. “Sometimes you get cases that come in that are sort of already half-baked. This was not one of them.”

Ted Diskant joined the SDNY investigation a few years later in the summer of 2017, as prosecutors were ramping up their work in a final push to prepare indictments. It was instantly clear that Boone and his team, including FBI agents, had “done an enormous amount of work” to build the case, said Diskant.

This involved “writing wires and serving subpoenas and writing corporate search warrants for email accounts and the like to help build a case like that,” added Diskant, now a partner at McDermott Will & Emery.

Following arrests that made front-page headlines in September 2017, the next phase allowed Boone to display his “tremendous presence” at trial that impresses juries with his “comfort on his feet,” Diskant said.

While his “very low-key” and “humble” personality serve Boone well in interviewing witnesses during an investigation, Diskant said, Boone shined during a “very aggressive” cross-examination of Christian Dawkins, the upstart sports agent defendant.

“Robert caught Dawkins making up a story. It was a really effective use of documents and information that we had gathered during the investigation to catch him in a lie, and one that I’m reasonably sure sealed Dawkins’ fate,” said Diskant. Dawkins was convicted of bribery and sentenced to one year in prison.

Now in his early months deploying his investigation chops for white-collar defendants, Boone envisions continuing his trial work at WilmerHale. At the firm, his practice is focused on representing companies and individuals under investigation by DOJ and the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Boone said he’s been representing executives in real estate, a major investment bank, and a major crypto company. Boone is also co-lead counsel in a lawsuit brought by WilmerHale

and the ACLU on behalf of Black voters challenging Georgia's new redistricting maps for allegedly diluting Black voting power.

The interviewing process has transferred seamlessly to the defense side, Boone said. While the sports corruption probe was heavily reliant on recorded wire-tap evidence, he said it's his other SDNY probes, from which he honed a strategy of getting witnesses to share revelatory information, that are proving especially relevant at WilmerHale.

For instance, he's not afraid to ask extra questions—even if it might make him seem ill-informed in a room full of high-powered lawyers. Boone will try the same question in a different manner, or press for further details to get to the bottom of a seemingly bizarre answer.

“There's always a level of human touch that comes into play that is really necessary to get to the facts,” whether it's as a prosecutor or as a defense lawyer, Boone said.