

## Cardinals' Computer Hacking

Chris Correa was a computer whiz who loved sports and worked in the scouting department of the St. Louis Cardinals. His skills and judgment led him to be promoted, and he became the Cardinals' scouting director in charge of the amateur draft.

In 2011, two of Correa's colleagues, who were higher up in the Cardinal's management, left the team to take top jobs with a rival team – the Houston Astros. Jeff Luhnow became the Astros' general manager and Sig Mejdal took the job of director of decisions sciences. Correa now says that he was worried that these men might have taken important information, including data and algorithms that the Cardinals had spent a lot of time and money to develop, to the Astros. And he thought they might be using the information against the Cardinals.

One day, Correa guessed Mejdal's password and used it to hack into the Astros' webmail system. He accessed the Astros' webmail at least 48 times (sometimes for as long as two hours at a time) over the next few years. He stole information, such as the Astros' scouting reports, draft rankings, and trade discussions. Correa also took steps to cover up his actions. But eventually, he was discovered. In 2014, it appears that Correa leaked internal Astros' trade talk notes to the prominent sports blog Deadspin, which caused the Astros to realize that their system had been compromised.

The FBI was called in. After some investigation, the U.S. Department of Justice charged Correa with five violations of the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act. Correa pled guilty in early 2016 and was sentenced to 46 months in prison. He was ordered to pay the Astros \$279,038 in restitution. Later, the Major League Baseball (MLB) Commissioner, Rob Manfred, imposed a lifetime ban on Correa from working in MLB. Manfred also fined the Cardinals \$2 million, although there is no solid evidence that anyone other than Correa was involved in the hacking.

At his sentencing, Correa signed a document admitting that he had caused \$1.7 million worth of losses to the Astros. However, whatever damage Correa did failed to prevent the Astros from being one of MLB's best teams from (at least) 2016 to 2022. The Astros won the World Series in 2017 and returned to the Series, but lost, in 2019 and 2021.

When Correa was interviewed in prison, he could not remember where he had been (at home? in his Cardinals' office?) when he had first hacked into the Astros' internal database. And when interviewed in prison by sportswriter Ben Reiter, Correa later tried to reconstruct his crime, asking: "Why am I here?"



**Discussion Questions**

1. Reiter writes: “While [Correa] knew what he was doing wasn’t right, he never thought that it could be a crime. ‘It was all in the context of a game, to me,’ he says. ‘When a pitcher throws at a batter’s chest, nobody runs to the local authorities and tries to file an assault charge. I’m not making excuses. I’m trying to explain where my head was at, as I now understand it. If another team does something wrong, you retaliate. That’s the lens through which I mistakenly viewed it, and I used that to give myself permission. It was wrong.’” It appears that Correa did not have ethics in his frame of reference when he launched his hacking scheme. Does it appear to you that he had a framing problem? Explain.
2. Is the fact that Correa was involved in a competition at the highest levels of baseball provide sufficient justification for his violating moral standards and/or the law?
  1. If you suspect that someone has broken into your house and stolen something, are you morally and/or legally justified in breaking into their house to see if you can locate your stuff there? The judge who sentenced Correa didn’t think so. Do you? Why or why not?
3. Reiter also writes: “There is another theory to explain Correa’s actions. It is that even if his intrusions came from a feeling that the Cardinals had themselves been violated, he used that to justify behavior that turned into something like a compulsion, rooted in both voyeurism and the fact that the information acquired by illicitly peering into a chief rival’s brain—and seeing the basis for every decision it made—provided an undeniable advantage to both the Cardinals and his own career.” If you have viewed the video on the self-serving bias, would you think that it might sometimes provide subconscious motivation for people to downplay ethics—to drop it out of their frame of reference-- when they make decisions? Explain why or why not.
4. Later, Correa had a realization: “What was really surreal to me was when I stood back and recognized how essentially disrespectful my behavior was of the people whose privacy I violated.” If you are blind to the impact that your actions have on others, do you automatically have a framing problem? Explain.
5. At the end of the day, Correa seems to be another good person who did a bad thing and has paid a serious price. At sentencing, he said that this was “the worst thing I’ve done in my life by far, and I am overwhelmed with remorse and regret.” Famed player and coach Leo Durocher once said: “Winning isn’t everything. It’s the only thing.” Did Durocher also have a framing problem? Was he right, or should winning with honor be the only thing? What is your view? Explain.

**Bibliography:**

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