

The case of Shohei Ohtani's former interpreter, Ippei Mizuhara, is an example of the vulnerabilities international athletes face. Mizuhara, who played an important role in Ohtani's transition to Major League Baseball, was found to have embezzled nearly \$17 million last spring in part to pay off gambling debts. A new detail to the story surfaced when *The Athletic* published audio obtained by the Department of Justice. Mizuhara is heard impersonating Ohtani's voice to push through a \$200,000 wire transfer request. Mizuhara claimed the transfer was for a car loan for a friend, and also acknowledged that there is a possibility of future loans. This betrayal reveals the potential risks for athletes who rely on close associates to navigate unfamiliar cultures and its financial systems.

As a Japanese baseball player competing in the United States, Ohtani relies on interpreters and advisors to manage language barriers and cultural differences. This reliance is common among international athletes, in which many lack local support networks or familiarity with the environments they are in. In Ohtani's case, Mizuhara abused his trusted role by changing his banking security protocols to impersonate Ohtani.

Mizuhara's deception shows the potential for harm when athletes' trust is betrayed by those within their inner circle. For Ohtani, who has always presented a grounded and disciplined public image, this incident shows just how such betrayals can come as a shock to sports fans alike.

According to an article by *Sports Illustrated*, prosecutors have recommended nearly five years in prison for Mizuhara, rejecting his claims that gambling addiction was the only driving force behind his actions. "Ultimately, the government submits, the motivating factor behind defendant's crimes was not a gambling addiction but rather greed," U.S. Attorney Jeff Mitchell said. According to *CBS*, Mizuhara pleaded guilty in June to spending millions from Ohtani's Arizona bank account to cover his growing gambling debts with an illegal bookmaker, as well as medical bills and the \$325,000 worth of baseball cards.

For many sports fans, this situation is another reminder of the pressures and risks faced by professional athletes. Often put into the spotlight and surrounded by advisors, interpreters, and business associates, athletes are required to put trust into the hands of others as they quickly navigate a world where their fame and wealth can make them easy targets.

As Ohtani prepares for the 2025 season, the incident is expected to leave a lasting impact on how he handles his personal and professional relationships moving forward. While Mizuhara's actions cannot undo the trust he once shared with Ohtani, it emphasizes a cautionary measure for other athletes.

It also raises questions about the accountability of those trusted with managing the finances of star athletes. Ohtani's case is a unique instance when it comes to betrayal specifically by an interpreter. This reflects the fact that interpreters often have the specialized role focused on communication without access to an athlete's finances or attempts to make financial decisions on behalf of them. As fans and the media continue to follow Mizuhara's sentencing, the story is a harsh reminder of the complexities of fame, trust, and responsibility in professional sports.

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