

# Professional Golfer, Swim Coach, and 38 Others Arrested in Osceola Sex Sting

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When law enforcement comes together from multiple counties and pool their resources for a huge investigation, the resulting arrests usually make headlines. In this case, a professional golfer, a swim coach, and 38 other people have been arrested for attempting to seduce children to commit sex acts by engaging in conversations online. The defendants all believed they were speaking with the child or with the child's parent when in reality, they were chatting with undercover police officers.

## The Charges

There were 40 people arrested in the Osceola sex sting, and the suspects face a variety of charges, including:

- traveling to seduce a child to commit sex acts
- using a computer to solicit a child or parent and,
- for some, attempted lewd and lascivious battery of a child

These charges are extremely serious in the state of Florida because ignorance of the victim's age cannot be used as a defense if one is arrested and accused of this kind of crime. The consequences for these types of crimes are extremely serious as well often resulting in a prison sentence up to 15 years, and being forced to [register as a sex offender](#).

## The Crimes

According to a detailed article in the [Palm Beach Post](#), of the 40 men arrested, one was professional golfer Stephen Wesley Thomas, 55. The PGA's website says he has played in 44 PGA Tour events and 34 on the Champions Tour with three career top-10 finishes. According to the arrest affidavit, Thomas thought he was chatting with a woman about sex with her 13-year-old daughter. He agreed to meet the teen for sex, deputies say, and sent photos of himself golfing.

Investigators searched Thomas' sport utility vehicle after his arrest, the affidavit states, finding three condoms,

two packages of chocolate pudding and a bottle of honey. Deputies say he confessed, according to the Palm Beach Post.

Another man arrested is also of some surprise. Gainesville swim coach Bryan Woodward, 29, coached youths for the Gator Swim Club. The club is private and unaffiliated with the University of Florida. Woodward's arrest affidavit states that he described graphics sex acts to an undercover officer posing as a child online, and brought candy with him to meet the "child."

According to the Palm Beach Post, the arrests were the result of an undercover operation that lasted from Jan. 8 through Monday. The sting was led by the Osceola County Sheriff's Office, dubbed "Operation Red Cheeks."

The basis of the operation was comprised of undercover detectives posing as children, or as parents or guardians, that chat online with suspects. The suspects would then travel to an arranged meeting location somewhere in Osceola County to allegedly have sex with a child. The Post says that many of the suspects brought alcohol or drugs, condoms, and other items to the location.

#### Criminal Defense

If you have been arrested and accused of trying to seduce a child to commit sexual acts, or using a computer to solicit the child or parent, you need the help of a criminal lawyer immediately. Again, you cannot use ignorance of the child's age as a defense. A [criminal defense lawyer](#) can help you get through this situation but if you have been arrested and accused of attempting to have sex with a child, you will be facing serious consequences no matter the situation.

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