

Operator of high-stakes poker games featuring celebs, Wall Street bankers, and Russian billionaires, dodges jail

William Barbalat — who operated high-stakes illegal poker games in New York — dodged jail Wednesday. Manhattan Federal Judge Jesse Furman sentenced Barbalat, 42, to two years of probation and 200 hours of community service.

The Soviet Union-born West Village resident — whose games had waitresses, massage girls, security guards, and dealers — was one of the people charged in April in a gambling ring with ties to the Russian mob. Barbalat pleaded guilty to

the crime of interstate travel in aid of unlawful activity and agreed to forfeit \$150,000 in illegal proceeds. His plea deal called for six to 12 months behind bars. The sports betting and poker ring at times catered to rich celebrities, Russian millionaires and billionaires and Wall Street bankers, the feds said. Barbalat worked with Arthur Azen, who used mixed martial arts fighters to menace

poker game debtors, according to prosecutors.

"We are pleased at today's outcome and that the judge was able to see our client for who he really is," said Barbalat's lawyer, Silvia Serpe. Prosecutors said Barbalat took a rake, or a percentage of the pot, from the poker games he hosted.

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Silvia L. Serpe, Partner
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hundreds of thousands, the feds said. A pre-sentence report has been damaged by a memo linking him to the Russian mob.