

FOOTBALL

Walters believes players, not agents, are the immoral ones

While the NCAA, six senior football players and agents everywhere hold their breath, high-powered entertainment agent Norby Walters can barely catch his.

Walters is talking fast, trying to blow the lid off the nebulous relationship between intercollegiate and professional football careers.

Unlike others in the business, Walters is ignoring discretion. He claims he is simply an honest businessman exposing hypocrisy. Walters thinks what others do under the table, he is doing so openly he wants a court of law to back him.

Primarily a rock-and-roll agent who has been in the entertainment business for 30 years, Walters scoffs at NCAA rules prohibiting an agent from paying pro prospects before their college eligibility is over. Furthermore, he has sued six seniors for breaking their contracts with him after he paid them \$55,000 up front.

Walters claims the players are the immoral ones, and he boasts that nobody can stop him from doing what he does for a living.

"I have done nothing wrong, illegal or immoral," Walters said. "In fact, I've helped this young man's family and allowed him \$10,000, \$12,000, \$15,000 knowing he'll be worth a million dollars. Why not let the family have the niceties of life or in some cases the necessities? I've helped put tires on cars."

As for the NCAA and its rules, Walters said: "Let the NCAA fold. Give the schools the right to hire kids and put them on salary. All they are is farm teams for the NFL. Look what the schools do when a kid is in high school. They don't care then whether he's a student. Every school is offering them everything. I wasn't even a big fan of sports and I was aware of what was going on."



Don Pierson
On pro football

The NCAA is investigating alleged payments by Walters of \$8,000 to Auburn fullback Brent Fullwood, \$15,000 to Purdue defensive back Rod Woodson, \$12,000 to Pittsburgh defensive end Tony Woods, \$10,000 to Clemson running back Terrence Flagler, \$6,000 to Washington defensive end Reggie Rogers and \$5,000 to Florida defensive back Adrian White.

All are among the top athletes in this year's collegiate crop and all deserted Walters after Walters's company, World Sports & Entertainment, corralled more potential first-round choices in the April 28 National Football League draft than one agency ever had signed before.

Walters accuses fellow agents of jealousy and conspiracy against him because he has become so successful in only one year.

"I have beaten them at their own game. Everybody knows 75 percent of the top 100 players are signed early. Other agents freak out when they find out Norby Walters beat them at their own game, which is signing up 75 percent of the kids early," Walters said.

Walters said agents are scaring his clients with horror stories that have grabbed the attention of the FBI as well as of the NCAA. Walters also accused college coaches of badmouthing him because he refuses to cut them in on his

deals.

Among the rival agents Walters mentions is Skokie's Steve Zucker, who represents several Bears, including Jim McMahon.

Walters said Zucker's aide, Kathe Clements, "seduced" Nebraska fullback Doug DuBose away from Walters with promises that DuBose would be drafted higher with Zucker.

Walters said DuBose later returned to his stable.

On March 16, Clements was beaten and stabbed in her office by a man wearing a ski mask and gloves.

Zucker said Clements had been confronted by Walters' partner, Lloyd Bloom, during the Senior Bowl in January and warned about a Zucker client who owed Walters money.

"So now she gets beat up, and they make up a story and say, 'I think Norby Walters did it,'" Walters said. "The FBI could check from now to the end of the world. I've got nothing to do with that crap at all."

Zucker said he has not accused Walters of anything and reserved further comment.

Walters said he has "about 12" players left from this year's class and "about 10" others have bolted.

"I can understand why some bolt: They're scared by other agents," Walters said. "But can I afford to sit and not sue?"

Walters said he is not suing every player who walked out on him.

"There are others who didn't take anything beforehand," Walters said. "The others, I did it with the knowledge of their parents. I sign the kid and their mother and father are out there with their



New York Daily News photo via UPI
Entertainment agent Norby Walters:
"Let the NCAA fold."

hands out: 'What can you give me? I'll take it.'

To Walters, a college football player is simply another entertainer.

"No difference. A sports star is a rock star. They're all the same," he said. "It's absolutely a part of the business to give

advances. Any agent will give a star an advance if he wants it. There's nothing shady or underhanded about it."

Walters also scoffs at efforts by the NFL Players Association to regulate agents. Walters is not certified by the NFLPA, but he can represent rookies because a player is not a member of the union until after he signs his first contract.

As part of this year's collective bargaining negotiations, the union wants management to give it jurisdiction over college seniors so it could have certification power over agents such as Walters and demand that they abide by certain rules.

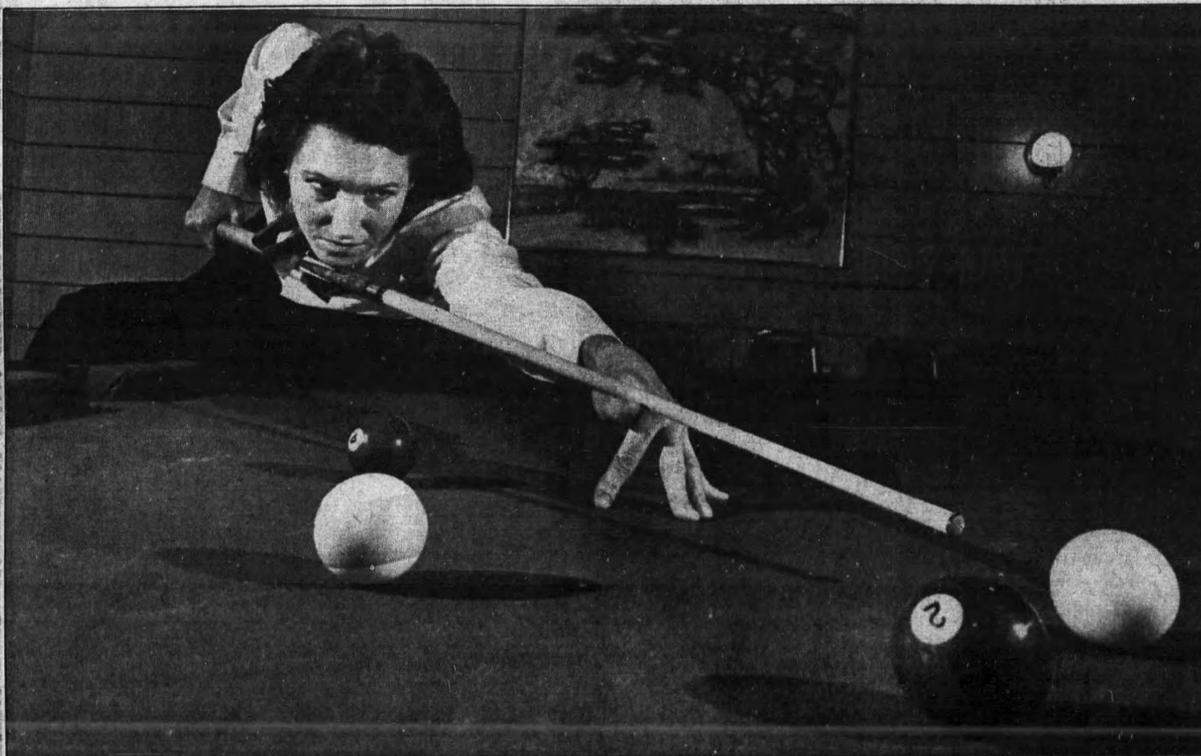
"That would be a monopolistic civil rights infringement and would bring the biggest lawsuits in the world," Walters said.

Walters has handled the contracts of singers Luther Vandross, Patti LaBelle, Jermaine Jackson, Kool and the Gang, the Four Tops and others. He chuckles at the reputation he claims other sports agents have placed on him in the last year.

"They are saying, 'Let's start spreading stories about him.' They've got me being a junkie, a rapist, a mob guy, a prostitute runner. How did I become this? Nobody ever heard one thing about my reputation before and I've been in the business 30 years," Walters said. "Nothing came out until I started suing these kids."

One other thing.
"All those agents, as much as they're knocking me, are cheering for me to win these cases because they want me to prove that a kid who signs a contract signs a contract, same way as the judge ruled in the case of Baby M. A deal is a deal."

BILLIARDS



With victories in nine consecutive women's tournaments, Jean Balukas is now setting her sights on winning a men's tourney.

She's just aiming to be one of the guys

Competing in men's tournaments not just a gimmick to Jean Balukas

This is one in an occasional series of articles on top athletes who play sports that normally do not receive headline coverage.

By Paul Sullivan

The pallor in "Spanish" Mike LeBron's face a few nights ago at the Pheasant Run Resort was in stark contrast to the color of money.

Ranked No. 13 by the Professional Billiards Association [PBA] going into the second-round match in the 9-Ball Classic Cup at the St. Charles resort, LeBron grabbed a quick 3-0 lead over his opponent before dropping 11 of the next 16 games and, thus, the match.

The fact that the loss knocked him into the losers' bracket in the double-elimination tournament wasn't the worst part, however. With a few breaks and some better shooting, LeBron could still come back to win the tournament and its \$10,000-added prize money in the open division. But the Philadelphia native had just lost to the only woman in the field of 64 professional billiards players.

LeBron was the second victim in as many days for Brooklyn-born Jean Balukas. In a sport in which some of the leading players hope that Paul Newman's Oscar-award winning performance in "The Color of Money" will serve as a springboard for more publicity, Balukas is trying to become the real-life female equivalent of the movie's co-star, Tom Cruise, taking on the more established pros and becoming to her opponents, in Cruise's words, "your worst nightmare."

After finishing off LeBron, Balukas calmly unscrewed her two-piece pool cue and neatly packed it into her "lucky" case. Her name is emblazoned on the outside of the

case, courtesy of a buddy back in Brooklyn she calls "Howie the tattoo artist."

Balukas, 27, has been competing in major tournaments since she was 9 years old—she won her first, the U.S. Billiards Open in Chicago, when she was 14—and is now boldly going where no woman has gone before. She wants to beat the men at their own game, with plenty of greenbacks on the line.

"I know it sounds far-fetched," Balukas said, "and I've still got a lot to learn, but winning a men's tournament is something I'd love to do. My game has a long way to go in order to beat the likes of a Mike Sigel [the No. 1-ranked player in the PBA], but as long as the person has the ability and the skill level is the same, there are no physical barriers for me."

Following a one-year layoff, Balukas has won nine straight women's tournaments since last September, and recently became the first woman approved by the PBA to play against the men in the open division of sanctioned tournaments. The sixth annual 9-Ball Classic Cup, which ends its weeklong run Sunday at Pheasant Run, is the third tournament this year in which Balukas has entered both the women's and open divisions.

She took first in the two previous women's tourneys, but was able to win only a few matches in the men's division.

Balukas was finally banished to the losers' bracket with a loss on Thursday and eliminated from the open division Friday after her second defeat, an 11-4 loss to David Howard of Jacksonville, Fla. She did, however, advance in the women's division, beating Robin Sinclair to reach the round of 16 on Friday. Another win on Saturday,

9-2 over Laverne Hagenbuch, put her among the final 12.

Sigel, who won five major tournaments last year, also is competing in the open division of the 9-Ball Classic Cup. He isn't into hustling in the traditional sense of the sport, but soon will be hustling a 40-minute instructional videotape on how to play the game.

"It's endorsed by Tom and Paul," said Sigel, dropping the names of billiard's two hottest cinematic symbols.

Sigel, a flamboyant 12-year pro with an amazing 76 tournament wins, served as technical adviser on "The Color of Money" and claims to have taught Cruise everything he knows about billiards.

One of the sport's most outrageous characters, he said he will do almost anything to focus attention on billiards, including throwing a punch at an opponent—as long as it was well-choreographed.

In much the same vein, Sigel said that most men on the tour don't mind having Balukas compete in the open division, believing she will be a great "gimmick" for billiards.

"I think letting her in is a great idea," Sigel said. "She's a great player. She can never win, but she can beat about 75 percent of the guys. It's more publicity for the game and will generate more interest in the sport in the long run."

Balukas took Sigel's backhanded compliment in stride.

"I don't think LeBron thinks it's a gimmick," she said. "I'm sure there's going to be a lot of men who think it's a gimmick. But I think that after 20 years, both the men and women haven't gotten anywhere in regards to getting a sponsor like the tennis and golf tours do. We need to stand together in a positive way. I'm helping the

sport for men and women both.

Balukas maintains that most of the women regulars on the pro tour are behind her, and Loree Jon Jones agrees wholeheartedly. Jones, 21, is ranked No. 3 by the Women's Professional Billiard Association and, three years ago, was the last woman to beat Balukas in the finals of a tournament.

"We're all rooting for her," Jones said. "Her dream is to win one against the men. We hope she does, but to be honest, it'll take a long, long time before that happens."

One issue that the tour regulars seem to agree on is the importance of capitalizing on the success of "The Color of Money," which was filmed almost entirely in Chicago. Balukas, whose father still runs the Brooklyn pool room where she learned the game at age 4, said that some changes in the sport already are evident because of the popularity of "The Hustler" sequel.

"Everyone that comes in wants a two-piece pool cue now," she said. "And everyone is going around swinging the stick around their heads like Cruise. The movie has had a very positive effect on the sport. Everyone will remember it as the one in which Newman won his first Oscar."

Sigel foresees a new era in the sport if the promotion is done the right way.

After hearing that boxing promoter Don King was in Chicago for election day, Sigel planned to contact him to discuss some of his ideas and perhaps persuade King to diversify his interests.

"With the exercise craze dying down, we should promote it as the sport that fat people and old people can play," Sigel said. "Maybe that would be the gimmick to put in front of people."

TENNIS

WCT Finals helps set stage for 1987

By Steve Tracy
Dallas Morning News

DALLAS—Ivan Lendl has a new sports car, and Boris Becker has a new girlfriend. Stefan Edberg has a new forehead, and John McEnroe has a new coach.

And these new acquisitions could well signal a new alignment in men's tennis. Certainly, the summer of 1987 promises to be a watershed season in the sport, and by the time the last jet has thundered over the U.S. Open courts this September, tennis' power brokers will have played their hands. It will be most interesting to see who folds.

While Mats Wilander, Yannick Noah and an emerging Miloslav Mecir have supporting roles, the upcoming season with its three Grand Slam events looks like a summer-stock drama that will have the top-ranked Lendl, Becker, Edberg and McEnroe in the lead roles. And while sports cars and girlfriends might not be as important as forehands and coaches, each might have an impact on the final outcome.

With McEnroe on the sidelines for seven months last year and Becker fighting inconsistency, Lendl built the biggest lead in the history of the Association of Tennis Professionals computer rankings. Unquestionably, he was, and is, No. 1.

But over the last six months, Lendl has been plagued by injuries, the latest resulting in arthroscopic surgery on his left knee and sidelining him indefinitely. He withdrew from the WCT Finals here, as did Becker, who complained of a stomach ailment.

But the tournament hasn't lacked excitement. McEnroe and Mecir advanced to Sunday's final with close victories Friday night. McEnroe beat Edberg 7-6, 6-7, 6-6, 6-4, and Mecir ousted Andres Gomez 6-7, 7-6, 6-4, 6-2.

Lendl also was nursing injuries after the 1986 U.S. Open, and since his victory at Flushing Meadow last September, he has played only five tournaments, winning only the Masters in December.

"The problem with Ivan," said a former agent for ProServ, the agency that handled Lendl's scheduling, "is that he gets an injury and takes off a lot of time to work with his sports car. Whenever I hear he has tendinitis or a [muscle] pull, I know it just means he wants some time off the tour for his other activities."

Not surprisingly, Lendl sees it differently.

"I've learned never to come back too soon," he said.

Lendl's lead in the ATP ratings, which are based on a revolving 52-week performance and not on the calendar year, is starting to dwindle, although he built such a lead last year that his No. 1 ranking is not yet in jeopardy. Last August he led Wilander by almost 90 points; going into the WCT Finals he led Becker by 56.

"The smaller tournaments don't really have that much effect on the top seven or eight players' point totals," an ATP spokesman said. "They make their rankings in the Grand Slams, which provide a

greater amount of points in the computer rankings. If a top-10 player is going to make a major move in the rankings, it is going to be because of the Grand Slams."

McEnroe has been reaping the benefits of his seven-month layoff through a quick rise in the rankings. After the U.S. Open, he dropped to 21st, but he has moved back up to No. 7. Because he was off at this time last year, he is not losing points as some early 1986 tournaments stop counting toward other players' point totals.

McEnroe hired a new coach in late January, former Mexican Davis Cup player Tony Palafox, who worked with McEnroe 10 years ago when McEnroe was a teenager.

"Tony can spot things in my game by just watching one set," McEnroe said. "He knows my game from when I started, and I think his input can only help."

But for McEnroe to challenge Lendl, Becker and Edberg, who is third in the ratings, he is going to have to make a splash in a Slam event. He said he wants to play the French Open, but clay has never been his best surface. That leaves Wimbledon and the U.S. Open.

The question of whether he can break into the top three might not be one of talent but of concentration. His marriage to Tatum O'Neal and the birth of their son have been distractions, although he managed three consecutive tournament victories last fall.

"When McEnroe was on his game in 1984, nothing seemed to bother him," Jimmy Connors said. "He didn't even get that upset. But now he complains about tennis becoming too much of a power game. I think other players are seeing a weakness."

Lendl and Becker are both power players, and Becker is at a major transition point in his career.

The 19-year-old West German has quieted talk that his first Wimbledon title was a fluke. Over the past 12 months, he won his second straight Wimbledon crown and jumped from No. 6 to No. 2. But in the Australian Open, he was fined \$2,000 for McEnroe-like tantrums. He fired his coach, Gunter Bosch, and for the first time seemed to have a steady girlfriend, 22-year-old Benedicte Courtin of Monaco.

"This will be an important year," Becker said. "I proved to myself that I can win Wimbledon again. Now I have to prove that I can be No. 1."

The one factor that might be the surprise this summer is Edberg's improved forehand. Four followers are amazed at how quickly Edberg has bolstered that weakness. The 22-year-old Swede won the Australian Open and had won 15 matches in a row before losing to Becker. He bumped Becker out of the No. 2 spot earlier this year before settling in at a strong No. 3.

Last year, Becker said that whenever he needed a point, he went to Edberg's forehand.

That may change this summer. And it may not be the only thing that does.