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Norby Walters cries foul, admits paying amateurs

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"Let me tell you," the steamed caller said. "I'm not a drug dealer, I don't work with prostitutes, I'm not a racketeer and I don't fix ballgames!" Norby Walters, a New York entertainment agent, was hot. He didn't like seeing his name in this column last Tuesday. He didn't like reading the details of how a federal grand jury here is investigating him for all sorts of possible mafia-like transgressions, including making pay-offs and threats to college athletes to get them under contract.

And now Walters, 55, calling from the Stouffer Hotel in Dallas, wanted to sing his own virtues.

"Listen," he said, "I'm strictly a boy from Brooklyn. I've been married 35 years. I've got three sons."

Fine, Norby. But is it true you've been violating the rules of amateur athletics and paying big money to college athletes to sign with you?

"I don't abide by all those rules set up by the colleges and professional football leagues," Walters replied. "I do my own thing. On the average, I probably pay \$10,000 to get a contract. I started with show business types and, as far as I'm concerned, football, baseball and all other sports are merely entertainment."

But, **Norby**, you're not supposed to pay amateurs.

"Well," **Walters** said, "if I'm guilty of paying players, then they'd better indict some of those college alumni because they're doing the same thing. They make contributions to the colleges and the colleges give these kids jobs. And sometimes I wonder how hard the kids really have to work."

"And there's something else," he added. "I sit down with the parents and relatives of these players and I give them money and I loan them money. Many of them are in dire need and I'm helping them out. What difference does it make if I pay the parents or the players? It's the same thing."

On another issue, **Norby**: The biggest sports agent in this town is Steven Zucker. Last March, his aide, Kathy Clements, 32, was beat up in his Skokie office by a thug wearing a ski mask. Some people suspect the thug was hired by another sports agent trying to intimidate competitors and muscle in on a little more business. Know anything about that, **Norby**?

"I had nothing to do with it," **Walters** said. "I met Clements once at a hotel bar and I saw her for 20 seconds. That was in Mobile, Alabama. They were having the Senior Bowl game. She sat in the bar with a number of players and was trying to sign up three or four of them. I saw her sitting there, showing off her legs. It's hard to compete with that."

Walters and a partner, **Lloyd Bloom**, operate World Sports & Entertainment Inc. Their firm, which employs 40 people and mostly represents black athletes and entertainers, is the focus of a federal grand jury investigation into alleged **racketeering** by sports agents.

So far, FBI agents have subpoenaed 60 athletes from 28 schools. The list of 60 athletes was subpoenaed from **Walters**.

Walters himself has yet to be called before the grand jury. But, he said, his bookkeeper was subpoenaed and questioned on the accuracy of **Walters'** records.

Walters said his big problem will be piecing together his shattered reputation once this investigation blows over.

"I'm confident I'll be cleared of any criminal violations," he said, "but how will I get the message of my innocence back to the industry. All they'll remember is all the bad things

they've heard."

Walters compared himself to President Reagan's former labor secretary, Raymond Donovan, who after being acquitted of grand larceny and fraud charges, bitterly asked: "Which office do I go to to get my reputation back?"

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