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Agents face tightening regulations - Players unions have adopted many restrictions

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"People call all the time saying they want to be agents and asking how," said Arthur Schack, counsel to the Major League Players Association. "I tell them, 'First, get a client.' " Enough clients were left to the whims of self-proclaimed, unqualified representatives that the NFL Players Association started a registration procedure in 1982 in an attempt to regulate agents.

The NBA Players Association and Major League Players Association followed suit in 1986.

Only agents registered with the associations can conduct contract negotiations for players.

The NFLPA has the most structured procedure and the NBAPA patterned its system after it. Baseball's procedures have yet to be made final but will not include a key provision of the other two associations, namely setting fee limits for agents. questionnaire, pay a \$200 annual membership fee and attend at least one seminar a year sponsored by the association. The daylong seminars deal with such topics as the collective-bargaining agreement, tax investment and planning, deferred and guaranteed salary compensation and related contract issues, she said.

The association fee structure mandates agents to charge no more than 10 percent of whatever is negotiated above the league-minimum \$60,000 salary for a first-year contract, no more than 5 percent in excess of the minimum for a second-year contract and no more than 2 percent of the excess in the third year.

The process also provides players and agents with a grievance procedure. Currently, Buffalo Bills running back **Ronnie Harmon** and agent **Norby Walters**, the subject of a federal grand jury investigation here examining agent recruitment of players, have grievances pending against each other.

By registering, agents also can receive from the association league

wide salary information to help in contract negotiations.

Last year, the association had more than 1,200 registered agents - almost as many as the 1,232 NFL players - and many had no clients. This year the number has declined to about 750 as the association drops those who have failed to attend annual meetings, pay fees or meet other requirements.

The NBAPA's procedure is similar, charging a \$400 annual registration fee. The fee structure limits agents to 4 percent of the excess minimum contracts. If a minimum contract is signed, the fee is \$2,000. There are about 400 registered agents, with only 300 players in the league.

Baseball's program is expected to be implemented by the end of the season. It will be similar to the others but will not set a fee limit for agents, Schack said. However, baseball will require an agent to have a client before registering.

About 150 agents are expected to register, Schack said.

The reason the unions have started agent registration is simple, says Charles Grantham, executive vice president of the NBAPA. "This is a business that has been created by the players," he said.

But registration does not address what Grantham said is the "major, major problem" in the agent business: improper recruiting of high school and college players.

"One of the things we've taken on is to look for a vehicle to get to these young people before they sign with anybody," he said.

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