

AGENTS OF

BY CRAIG NEFF

With reporting by Jill Lieber and Bruce Selcraig



CYNTHIA JOHNSON

WALTERS BLAMES THE PLAYERS



RUMORS HAVE ENGULFED **BLOOM**

IT IS HARD TO OVERSTATE THE HAVOC that Norby Walters has wrought in his brief career as a sports agent. In the nearly three years since this fast-talking show-biz booking agent decided to represent athletes, he has become the most controversial operative in a field that thrives on turmoil and contention. He has made enemies, headlines and mistakes in profusion, prompting urgent calls by both sports and government officials for reform of the sports-agent game to protect athletes from his supposedly dangerous ilk.

For his part, the 56-year-old Walters, whose activities are under investigation by the FBI and a federal grand jury in Chicago, claims to have done nothing illegal or immoral. He says he is the innocent victim of jealous, rumor-planting rival agents, sensationalizing reporters and unscrupulous collegians who have robbed him blind. He admits only that he paid and signed college football and basketball players—an act of unappreciated generosity, as he sees it. “I’ve given my blood money to these kids,” he says. Walters makes this assertion with an odd mixture of swagger and despair. On the one hand, he asserts that the money he has spent on athletes is, by the standards of the entertainment industry from which he springs, small potatoes. On the other hand, he allows that his foray into sports may have been his Waterloo. “On Day One, if I had known this thing would have gone into this kind of investment, I wouldn’t have done it,” he says, “because I never dreamt it would be this tough or this strange or this exasperating. . . . I’m sick right now from this whole thing.”

In tandem with Lloyd Bloom, 28, his principal associate in the New York firm of World Sports & Entertainment, Inc., Walters sought to corner the market in blue-chip college football players,

and it looked for a while as if he might actually succeed. Expending vast sums of money—Bloom puts the total at \$800,000—World Sports & Entertainment signed at least 30 athletes, including some of the biggest names in college sports. Walters and Bloom gave money to at least five of this year’s first-round NFL draft choices before their eligibility expired, and signed all of them to contracts.

The players who took Walters’s money while they still had eligibility remaining violated NCAA rules. As Walters points out, this wasn’t a first. Mike Trope, for one, a Los Angeles-based agent, admitted signing a number of underclassmen as far back as 1978. But things got messy for Walters when 1) some of his signees got it into their heads to defect to other agents and 2) Walters, getting it into his head that he had been wronged, decided to sue the athletes and to speak out in the newspapers. Since then the situation has taken a succession of sensational twists and turns:

- On March 16, Kathe Clements, an associate of sports agent Steve Zucker and the wife of former Notre Dame quarterback Tom Clements, was slashed and beaten in her office in the Chicago suburb of Skokie, Ill., by a man wearing a ski mask and gloves. Zucker says he and Kathe Clements had signed three of Walters’s former clients—Cincinnati Bengals (and former Tennessee) wide receiver Tim McGee, ex-Nebraska running back Doug DuBose (now with San Francisco) and University of Washington defensive lineman Reggie Rogers, the Detroit Lions’ No. 1 pick—and that Walters and Bloom had upbraided Clements over the phone. Zucker also claims that Bloom confronted Clements at the Senior Bowl in January about a Zucker client who allegedly owed Bloom and Walters money, telling her

TURMOIL

Norby **Walters** stormed into college sports and, with his fellow agent **Lloyd Bloom**, wooed blue-chip athletes with cash. The upshot of it is a grand jury investigation, charges of threats, ruined college careers

that "people who don't pay their debts can have their hands broken." Michael Langer, a Skokie police lieutenant, at first said Walters was a suspect in the attack on Clements, but so far police have found no evidence to link Walters or WSE to the incident.

• Concerned about the Clements attack and other reports linking **Walters** and **Bloom** to possible illegal activities, the FBI opened an investigation and a federal grand jury in Chicago began a broad inquiry in May of **Walters's** and **Bloom's** work as sports agents. The grand jury, which is expected to sit through the summer and possibly longer, has subpoenaed dozens of college and pro players and several college administrators and is focusing on allegations that Walters or his associates were engaged in **fraud** and **racketeering**. The

grand jury also is considering whether to indict athletes for **defrauding** their universities, for whom they sign statements each year swearing that they have broken no NCAA rules, as well as with tax evasion, for possibly failing to report money received from WSE. Proving some of the **fraud** allegations has been difficult, according to a source with knowledge of the investigation.

• The NFL Players Association said it had received phone calls from two former WSE clients who claimed they had been threatened by **Walters** after leaving him. "Both players' stories were almost identical," an NFLPA source told *The Atlanta Constitution*. "They said Walters called them and told them, 'I'm going to talk to my people in Las Vegas and get them to break your legs.'" These were but two of several reported

threats. One former **Walters** client, William Harris, a University of Texas tight end who transferred to Bishop College in Dallas last year and was chosen by the St. Louis Cardinals in the seventh round in this year's NFL draft, told SI that **Walters** didn't threaten him when he left WSE but that "he threatened a couple of my football-playing buddies. He told one, a wide receiver, he'd have his knees broken." *The New York Times* reported that the FBI office in Dallas has a tape recording on which **Bloom** can be heard threatening to break the hands of former SMU wide receiver Ron Morris if Morris signed with another agent. And in the most startling revelation, former Auburn running back Brent Fullwood, the Packers' No. 1 draft choice, who has admitted signing with **Walters** and taking money from him

FULLWOOD SIGNED EARLY . . .



GEORGE TIEDMANN

. . . AND PITT PUT GLADMAN (32) OUT, DECLARING HIM INELIGIBLE



RONALD C. MOORA



ZUCKER WAS CRYING FOUL . . .



. . . OVER CLEMENTS'S PLIGHT

while still eligible for college football, told *The Constitution* that he testified to the Chicago grand jury that Bloom had threatened to "bump off" Fullwood's current agent, George Kickliter, for signing Fullwood away from WSE. Bloom denies the charge and says he never threatened anyone. Walters also denies threatening anyone.

• Walters filed breach-of-contract suits against six of the players who left him and asked that the players be forced to repay all the money he had given to them. These include five of this year's first-round NFL draft choices—Rogers, Fullwood, Purdue defensive back Rod Woodson (Steelers), Pitt defensive end-linebacker Tony Woods (Seahawks) and Clemson running back Terrence Flagler (49ers)—as well as the Bills' second-year running back, Ronnie Harmon, who has admitted receiving \$54,172.92 from Walters beginning in his junior year at Iowa. "That's not so much money," Harmon told SI. "That's over two years. What's that, \$27,000 a year? I had living

expenses—an apartment and a car." Because Harmon's contract falls under the jurisdiction of the NFLPA, his case will be decided by a players' association arbitrator. A hearing was held June 10 and a decision is pending. At the same time, Rogers is suing Walters and G. Patrick Healy, an attorney from Tacoma who allegedly loaned him money, for misrepresentation. Two former Florida players, defensive back Adrian White and running back Frankie Neal, also are suing to have their contracts with Walters voided.

• In addition to Harmon, Fullwood, Rogers, McGee, Harris, former Texas running back Edwin Simmons and former Southern Mississippi wide receiver Andrew Mott all told SI that they took money while still eligible for college football. Woodson, Flagler and Woods have also been identified as having done so. (NCAA rules, it should be noted, do not penalize schools in such cases unless it is established that school officials either knew or should have known of the payments and did not immediately suspend the players.)

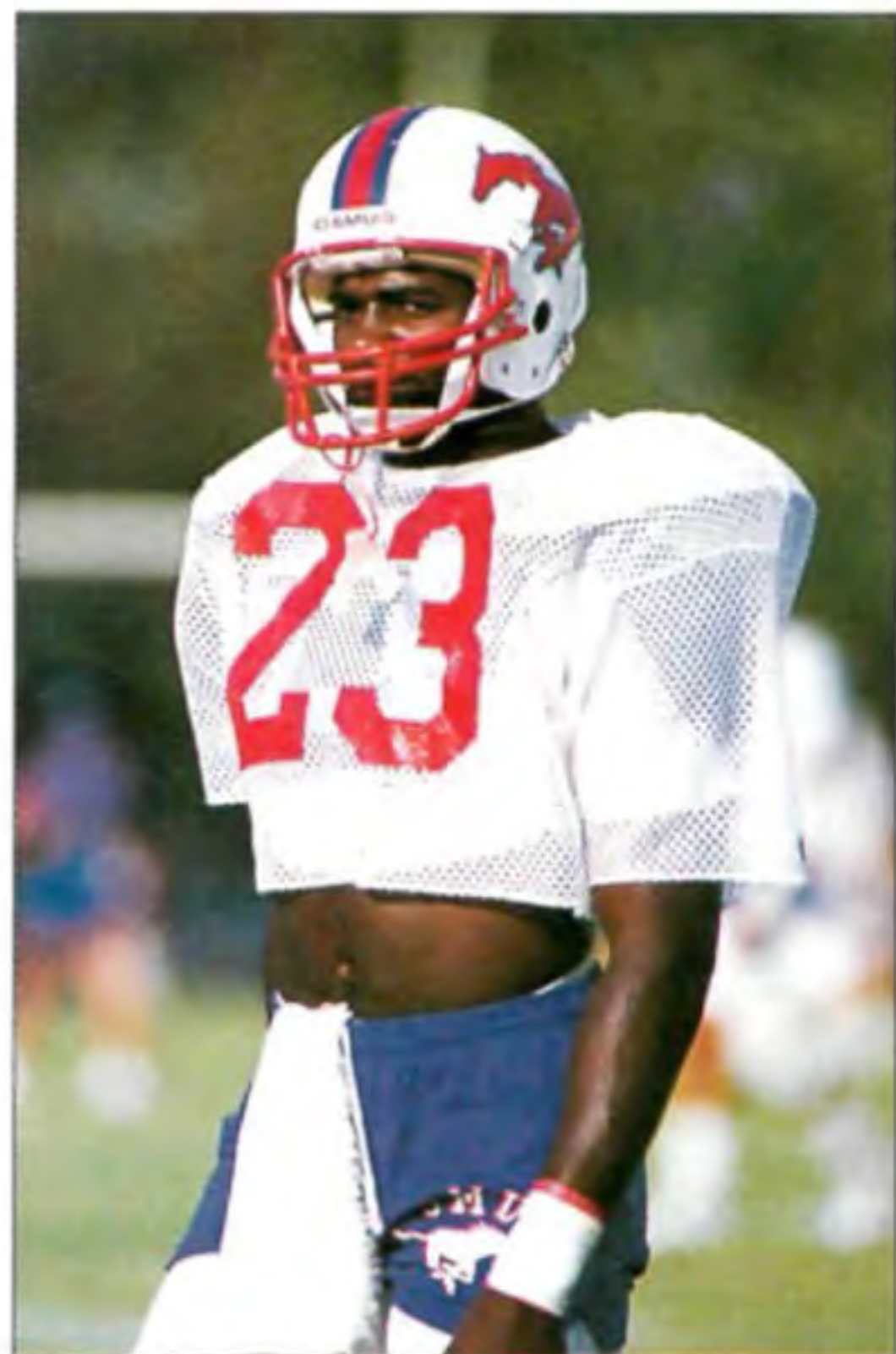
• At least four college athletes were declared ineligible for their upcoming senior seasons because of their involvement with WSE. On July 15, Ohio State declared ineligible wide receiver Cris Carter, a Heisman Trophy candidate, after Carter admitted to school officials that he had signed a contract and accepted a \$5,000 loan from Walters and Bloom in May 1986 and had subsequently accepted monthly payments totaling \$1,800 (see box, page 38). Previously, Alabama had declared basketball star Derrick McKey ineligible for signing with and taking a \$2,500 promissory note from WSE. McKey entered the June NBA draft and was selected in the first round by Seattle. Pitt defensive back Teryl Austin lost his eligibility for his senior season after he admitted signing with and taking money from WSE. Pitt also declared running back Charles Gladman ineligible after he refused to cooperate with NCAA and university investigations into WSE's dealings with Panther players. Gladman denies involvement with Walters's firm. More players may yet be declared ineligible, although Bloom said they won't be WSE clients. Robert Berry, a Boston College law professor who is representing Carter in his dealings with the NCAA and the

NFL, recently told the Associated Press: "I think of your top players, a good 50 percent have received some type of payment."

• Last spring, Big 10 and Southeastern Conference representatives checked into the possibility that some players involved with Walters might have attempted to shave points in football and basketball games. Harmon fumbled four times in the first half and dropped a pass in the end zone in Iowa's 45-28 loss to UCLA in the 1986 Rose Bowl. Conference officials say they have found no evidence of point shaving.

Clearly, no ordinary man could have created so much commotion. But nobody has ever accused Norby Walters of being ordinary, least of all himself. The white-haired, deceptively mild-looking Walters has made a name for himself over the last two decades as a booking agent for such entertainers as Miles Davis, Luther Vandross, Patti LaBelle, Janet Jackson, Kool and the Gang and Ben Vereen. "I've become Norby Walters, the premier seller of black entertainment in the United States of America, maybe in the world," he likes to brag.

The premier seller of black entertainment in the world (maybe) grew up in Brooklyn as Norby Meyer, the son of Joseph Meyer, a onetime lightweight who boxed in the Army under the name of Soldier Meyer. After World War II, Meyer owned a jazz club called Soldier



SMU'S MORRIS: VICTIM OF THREATS?



AVO33N/SDNHWRRD WIF

FRANZESE DISPUTES WALTERS

Meyer's Brooklyn Bop House but sold it in 1953 to Norby and his older brother, Walter, who renamed the place Norby & Walter's Bel-Air. As the two brothers tell the story, the ampersand on the club's neon sign didn't work and everyone came to know the club as Norby Walter's. Eventually both Meyer brothers changed their last name to **Walters**.

The Brooklyn club featured such notable jazz musicians as Davis, Charlie Parker and Zoot Sims. The **Walters** brothers later owned other clubs offering everything from the Latin rhythms of Tito Puente to the nightclub act of transsexual Christine Jorgensen to belly dancing, the last at an establishment in Queens called Arabian Nights.

In January 1966 Norby **Walters** Supper Club opened next door to the Copacabana on Manhattan's East Side. Norby was the greeter at night. "He could bull—and rap with anybody," says Walter **Walters** admiringly. "He could talk with a **Mafia** captain. He could talk with a hooker off the street. He knew how to handle everybody. Best up-front man in the business, maybe in the whole United States."

After nearly two years in operation, however, Norby **Walters** lost its liquor license because of what a New York State Liquor Authority report obtained by SI describes as "a highly adverse police and license history for assaults and prostitution activities." The establishment continued to operate for another three months, during which time two mobsters, Oresto Joseph Bruni and Rosario (Sonny) Parisi, were shot to death at the bar by a third man after an argument on March 22, 1968. The establishment was then closed. Norby then de-

ecided to try his hand as a booking agent. He began with bands in New Jersey and Long Island. Smart and hardworking, **Walters** built an extremely successful business. "For a kid to come from a cold-water, third-floor flat, I think he did pretty good," says his brother, a booking agent in Florida.

Entertainment agents have occasionally ventured into sports, and Norby **Walters** was receptive when, in early 1985, **Bloom** suggested they team up to recruit and represent college athletes. **Bloom**, a cocky and persuasive sort, had variously worked as a bouncer at New York's Studio 54, as a professional party giver for New York companies and celebrities and as an employee at his father's collection agency in nearby Westchester County. He had played tight end and linebacker at Irvington (N.Y.) High and, according to coaches, had been disappointed when no major college recruited him. Says one of **Bloom's** former coaches, "His dream was always to own a pro football team." **Bloom's** proposal to **Walters** was simple: **Bloom** would use his sports knowledge to recruit athletes and Norby would be, well, Norby.

The athletes **Walters** and **Bloom** sought fit a pattern. All were black and many were needy, often with a sick relative or a single parent. After introductory phone calls, **Walters** and **Bloom** would meet with a player, usually in a hotel room. Players interviewed by SI

say that **Walters** would launch into a high-velocity sales pitch. Ordinarily, he talks very much like a Borscht Belt comic, but he came across to the players as a curious mixture of social activist and street-corner jive artist.

"Norby would do this," says Rogers. "He'd shake your hand and say, 'I'm Norby Walters.' Then he'd snap his fingers twice and say, 'agent of the stars!'"

"I thought he was black, having spoken to him on the phone," says Simmons. "I was very surprised when I met him. He told me he had marched with Martin Luther King, that he has marched with minorities in the South—Alabama, Georgia. He said he grew up in the slums, that all his life he has been around black people and he knew how they thought."

"He had the speech patterns down," says McGee. "He talked like the black guys on the corner, the same junk."

"He seemed to know the time to turn on his black speech, like, 'Hey, what's happening, man?'—the brother lingo," says Mott. "The coaches who recruit you for college do the same thing. **Norby** sounded more believable, like he had been doing it a long time."

"His actions were black," says St. Louis Cardinals rookie George Swarn, a former Miami of Ohio running back, who told SI he turned down an offer of \$2,500 from **Walters**. "Like, he walked with a slight limp. You know,



CYNTHIA JOHNSON

HARMON (CENTER) ATTENDED AN NFLPA HEARING ON HIS CONTRACT

A SAD GOODBYE TO COLUMBUS

A few short months ago Cris Carter could do no wrong. On New Year's Day he caught four passes for 61 yards in the Cotton Bowl to finish his junior season at Ohio State with school records for receptions (69), yards (1,127) and touchdown catches (11). He was a consensus All-America, the first Buckeye receiver so honored in 42 years.

On July 15, Carter's college career ended. Ohio State athletic director Rick Bay declared him ineligible after learning that Carter had, in violation of NCAA rules, signed with agents Norby Walters and Lloyd Bloom in the spring of his sophomore year and accepted from them a \$5,000 interest-free loan and \$1,800 in monthly payments. "I must be [held] responsible for my actions," acknowledged Carter in a written statement handed out at the press conference.

Carter's is the story of a young man seduced by greed and torn between

two brothers. Clarence (Butch) Carter, 29, the former NBA guard (L.A. Lakers, Indiana, New York and Philadelphia) and the oldest of seven Carter children, wanted Cris to follow the straight and narrow. George Carter, 27, a former Illinois State basketball player and convicted felon, had different ideas. It is with George Carter that the trouble apparently started.

In April 1986, according to Boston College law professor Robert Berry, one of Cris Carter's new legal advisers, George Carter was hanging around Cris's Columbus apartment when he noticed an unopened letter from World Sports & Entertainment, Walters's New York firm. George read the letter. Within a few days George—who had been released five months earlier from state prison in Jacksonville, Ill., where he had served 16 months for burglary and forgery—flew to New York at Walters's expense. Says Berry,

"He called Cris and said, 'You can get an interest-free loan from these guys. They'll give you money.'"

On May 1, 1986, Bloom came to Columbus with a large amount of cash, a \$5,000 promissory note and a contract. Bloom, Cris and George rode around town for several hours in Cris's car, discussing a possible deal, according to Berry. "The other two started working on Cris," says Berry. Bloom told Cris that he would postdate the contract to Jan. 2, 1988—the day after next season's Rose Bowl, the last possible game of Cris's senior year. Finally, Berry said, Cris stopped the car and signed. Bloom gave him \$5,000 cash and promised him additional payments every month for the rest of his college career.

What Cris didn't know, according to Butch Carter, was that George was already working as a recruiter for Walters and Bloom. Bloom says that WSE has indeed employed George in that capacity, but he insists that the firm hired him the same day that Cris signed with the agents. Ohio Parole Commission records indicate that WSE hired George for \$39,000 a year as a "special assistant"; Bloom says, however, that George's salary was unspecified. "George is such a snake," says Butch.

Butch Carter says that George's "sole purpose" in working for Walters was "to bring Cris into Norby's fold." He also says that George funneled \$12,000 of Walters's money to Cris to buy a car. Butch says he persuaded Cris to return the car to George—and that George shortly thereafter totaled it in an accident. There is no record of the incident with the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles.

Butch, who works as a financial planner in Dayton and a high school basketball coach in the Carter hometown of Middletown, Ohio, says he sent Cris \$75 every other week so he wouldn't need money. He also says he paid his brother's credit card bills.

The payments from WSE continued until March of this year when Cris was suddenly being linked to Walters in newspaper reports. When Butch confronted him about the reports, Cris broke down and admitted they were true. Butch wanted to turn his brother in immediately, but Berry told him to wait until they had explored ways to salvage Cris's eligibility.

Ohio State athletic officials pressed Carter about his alleged ties to Walters, but Cris repeatedly denied any involvement. "He just outright lied," says Ohio State coach Earle Bruce.

In May Cris was subpoenaed by the federal grand jury in Chicago looking into the activities of Walters and Bloom. On July 10, Berry told Bruce that Cris had signed with WSE.

Cris now faces possible criminal charges and may be sued by Walters



CHUCK SOLOMON

CRIS WAS CONSIDERED A PRIZE CATCH

for breach of contract. Says Bruce, "I hope someday I'll be able to forgive him, but I won't forget what he has done."

Berry, meanwhile, has petitioned the NFL for a supplementary draft that would allow Cris to play in the pros this fall. NFL rules bar anyone from entering the league until either he or his class graduates from college, and some NFL owners have expressed fears that letting Carter compete this season would encourage large numbers of other underclassmen to sign with agents. However, the NFL has made numerous exceptions to the rule in the past, at least once after a player threatened a lawsuit. At week's end Berry was waiting for word from the NFL.

George Carter spoke to SI several times in June but he has not returned phone calls since then. He said he would need money to tell his story because "I have to be able to leave Middletown after I've talked. I know how powerful Norby and them is." He added: "I have tried to sever my ties [with them]. Every time I mention that, they threaten me." Walters and Bloom denied having threatened anyone.

George correctly predicted in a June conversation that his brother would be declared ineligible. He also asserted: "You can't find a player in the first round next year who hasn't already signed with an agent." Though perhaps an exaggeration, Carter's words ought to make college athletic officials nervous.

—JILL LIEBER



CRIS: SORRY



GEORGE: SCARED



BUTCH: ANGRY

how a lot of blacks walk, kind of cool. A strut."

In dealing with the young athletes Walters shamelessly dropped the names of his famous clients, sometimes producing copies of *Billboard* stories alluding to himself. He was full of big talk and big promises. "He said he could introduce me to Whitney Houston, Patti LaBelle, Luther Vandross and Janet Jackson. He said he managed them," says Mark Ingram, a former Michigan State wide receiver and the first draft pick of the New York Giants. Ingram says he signed with Walters after his college eligibility expired. Simmons recalls Walters telling him "that from now on I'd be at every Grammy Awards. I was going to go to everything. I was also told that I could go to New York or Los Angeles anytime I wanted to. And Norby told me he'd pay for it. He never told me I'd have to pay him back."

As often as not, the pitch worked. Paul Palmer, the Temple running back chosen in the first round of the draft by Kansas City, said that after Walters rattled off the names of his show-biz clients, "I was impressed. With the millions of dollars they represent with

those clients, I figured they could handle my pennies." They did. Palmer signed July 17 with the Chiefs for an estimated \$1.35 million over four years. Bloom handled the negotiations.

Walters and Bloom also went to great lengths to ingratiate themselves with the athletes' families, especially their mothers. Bloom became so comfortable at McGee's house in Cleveland that he would lie on the floor and watch TV with the family. "He [Walters] said he wanted to become the Number 1 agent in the NFL for negotiating contracts for

black athletes," says McGee's mother, Atheree. "His selling pitch was that he didn't need the athletes' money."

On the contrary, Walters appeared to be willing to give away money. And, according to several players, he did it with flair, spreading money out on a table. In Mott's case, he spread it across the floor at his feet.

Some signed eagerly. "The minute he opened the briefcase I said, 'Gimme the pen!'" Simmons says. There were also more cautious souls, like Mott. "Norby came out of his pocket with a bunch of money—a wad," he says. Mott holds his thumb and forefinger about four inches apart. "It looked like ten thousand dollars or more. My eyes just got big." According to Mott, Walters spread the money across the floor. Then Mott said, "No, it's against the NCAA rules. It's illegal. I might get in a lot of trouble." And Norby said, "Well, you can't get in trouble." He said that it was April, but that he would postdate the contract till December 1—after the final game. . . . He said that it was perfectly legal. And that there would be no way to trace it back. The school and the NCAA would never know." McGee apparently did not care if his school found out. "Face it," he says. "Where is the risk? If I got caught by one of the coaches, do you think they would tell on me? No way." Tennessee athletic director Doug Dickey said, "If we know he's ineligible, we would report it."

Simmons told SI that he took \$4,000 in 20's from Walters at their first meeting and received at least \$10,000 in subsequent compensation; Mott said he took \$4,500; McGee, \$3,500. Others who acknowledged signing early with Walters said they received these amounts: Rogers, \$5,000; Fullwood, \$4,000; Harris, \$6,000.

In explaining why they took the money, some athletes cited family need. Mott said his mother was in debt and on the verge of losing her house. Rogers's mother, Loretha, who has had heart and back problems, had bills piling up and virtually no source of income after the June 1986 cocaine-induced death of her son Don, the Cleveland Browns safety.

"I had to take money from Norby," says McGee. "There were bills to be paid. My mom ain't working. I have no dad. I have two nieces and two sisters to support. Norby took

me from rags to riches in one day."

Yet not all the money went to feed the poor, hungry relatives: Harmon's \$54,000 debt reportedly includes a \$25,000 down payment that Walters and Bloom made for him on a leased Mercedes. Harris says he spent none of the cash he received on his family. Asked why he didn't hold off signing with an agent until his college eligibility expired four months later, Harris replied, "It's hard to wait when you have something in front of you."

Besides lavishing money on the athletes, Walters made good on his promises of trips to New York and L.A. He put them up in places like the Beverly Hills Hotel and took them to concerts, parties and clubs, where they rubbed elbows with recording artists and movie and TV stars. Palmer got to go to the Grammy ceremonies. While on these trips, the athletes were encouraged to spend; at least one says he was given the use of Walters's American Express card. "I bought a Louis Vuitton billfold and gold jewelry," recalls Harris, who claims to have gone to New York four times and L.A. twice at Walters's expense. "Some people even got video cameras. They bought whatever they felt like. It was like Christmas."

One of the sober realities behind Walters's dealings with college athletes was the apparent one-sided nature of the contracts they entered into. Few, if any, of the athletes were represented by lawyers at the time they signed. "I didn't have a chance to think, he was talking so fast," says Fullwood. Adds Mott, "[Walters] wouldn't let me read [the contract]. He read it to me. He never showed it to my mom. It seemed like when he was reading it, it sounded good."

It wasn't. Walters's contracts typically gave the agent full power of attorney over the players' financial affairs. A typical contract guarantees Walters 6%, up front, of the total value of any NFL deal signed by the player (including all bonuses) and 10% of the player's endorsement income. By contrast, the NFLPA advises a player never to pay his agent a percentage of his entire contract, but to pay him yearly; the percentage should be no more than 10% the first year, 5% the second, 2% the third and none thereafter, and it should be based only on the amount of salary earned each year above the NFL minimum.

Mike Duberstein, director of research for the NFLPA, has seen two of the Walters contracts. "They're atrocious," he says. "In terms of dealing with the players, I'd call them a rip-off." Duberstein says he is "shocked" that so many players sign power of attorney to agents. "What's unsound is that it gives control of a player's destiny to someone other than himself," he says.

From the start, some athletes were less than enchanted with Walters. Swarn, for one, refused to sign with him, explaining, "He told me he understands the soul of the black man. I think it was their pocket he understood." However, others players became disillusioned only after signing. Some had been led to believe that Walters was the personal manager of black entertainers and were

shocked to learn he was actually a booking agent. Others came to see the light about the contracts they had signed. Still others got turned off by Walters's style.

"I didn't want to be one of many," says McGee. "Lloyd would call and say, 'We're talking to such and such.' That was fine. But when I got to the Hula Bowl [in Honolulu on Jan. 11, 1986], I found out that Norby was talking to everybody at every school." Rival agents were still courting McGee, and they had him doubting Walters and Bloom all the more. "I said [to Walters], 'You have never once told me who is going to manage my money,'" McGee recalls. "IMG and ProServ [major agent firms] came in on weekends and gave me their pitch. That was the first thing they told me. But with Norby, all I heard was, 'Want to go to a concert?'"

At the 1987 Senior Bowl in Mobile, Ala., last January, Walters and Bloom were marked men. "Everyone's gunning for me," Bloom told SI. "Rumors are all over. I'm supposed to be a dope dealer." One day during Senior Bowl week a group of WSE clients and ex-clients happened to be sitting together on a team bus. Walters's name came up. "Everybody put his head down and shook it," recalls Harris. The tide had clearly shifted. The players on the bus began mocking Walters, laughing at him. "He's full of ——!" declared one.

One by one, players abandoned Walters in favor of other agents. One of the defectors, Simmons, says he quit Walters partly because of concerns about Norby's image. "Look, my reputation isn't the best in the world, either," Simmons says. "I figured my being represented by Norby Walters wasn't going to help me in the NFL draft. I didn't want people to think worse about me than they already did." Simmons wasn't drafted, but later signed as a free agent with the Indianapolis Colts. He retired last Friday.

Simmons's former Texas teammate, Harris, also jumped ship, in part, he says, because Walters never came up with the BMW Harris says he was promised after the second game of his senior year.

In an apparent effort to stem the unfavorable tide, Walters hired former NFL wide receiver Ron Jessie, who sought to dissuade the players from leaving the fold. "I talked to some of them



SIMMONS EAGERLY SIGNED UP



PALMER STUCK WITH WALTERS



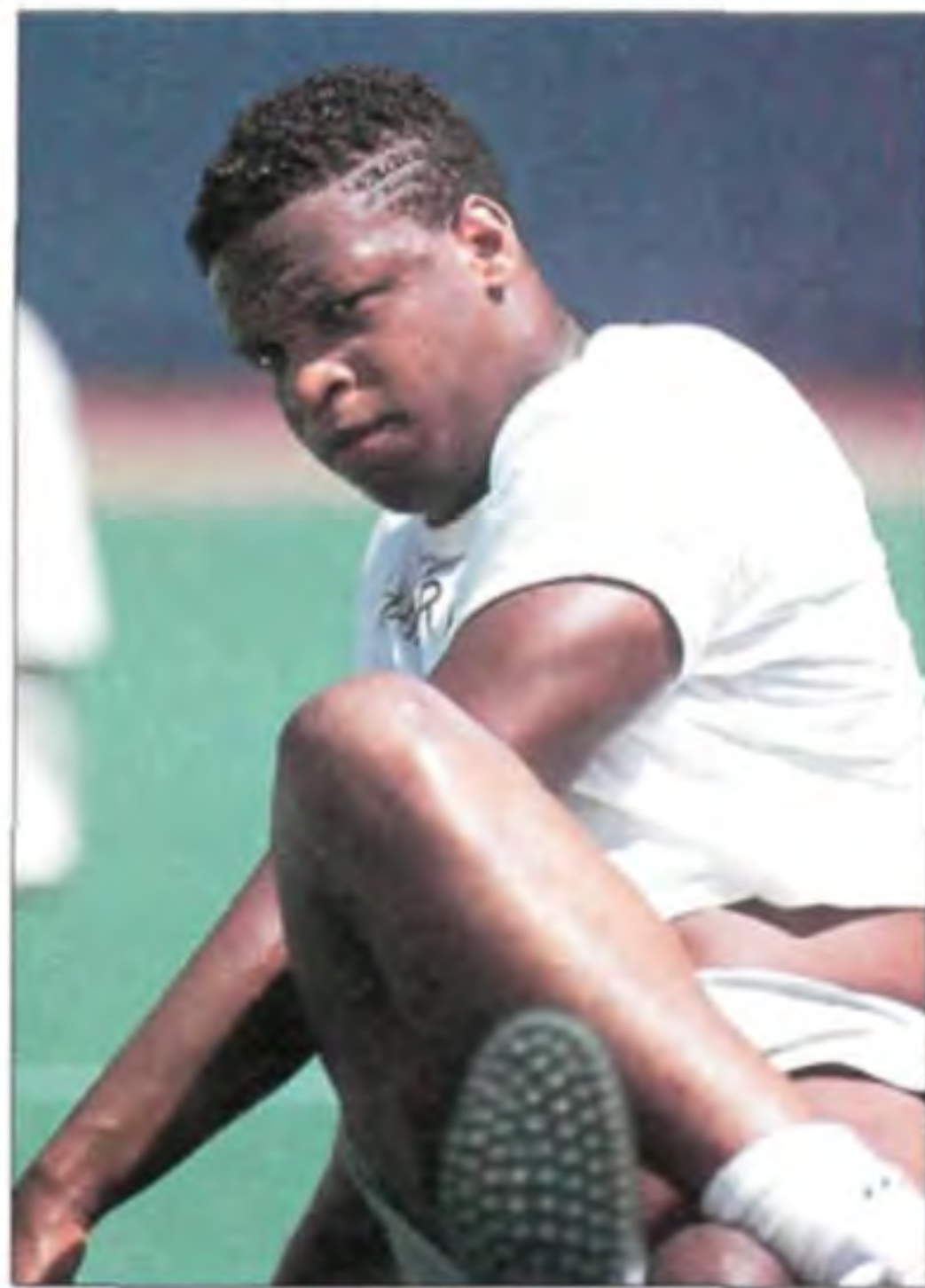
ROGERS, NOW WITH DETROIT, GOT A CAR FROM HIS BROTHER DON

... to try and warn them of the consequences of [deserting Walters]," Jessie says. "If they had listened to me and settled with Norby and treated it as a business, a whole lot of this FBI stuff would have been avoided."

Walters aired his grievances with his clients in a March 12 story in *The Atlanta Constitution* and further publicized them by filing the breach-of-contract suits. "I'm suing these players because they have wronged me," Walters insists. "I've taken care of their mommies and their daddies and their babies and their cars. They are the immoral ones. They took the money from the schools. They took the money from their alumni. They signed a contract with me. They took my money."

"Other agents were assuming that I would just roll over and accept [the players] leaving. That's not going to happen. I will continue to sue each and every businessman who goes into business with me and breaks the contract. I don't consider a player anything other than a businessman."

Of course, when he speaks of the sanctity of his contracts, Walters glosses over the fact that in signing the players in the first place, he was interfering with their commitments to their schools. But Walters is justified in questioning the morality of many college players, a fact underscored by ex-client Harris, who told SI: "We all know that you take money from these guys but you don't



HARRIS WAS A FREE SPENDER

have to go with them in the end. Play out the string. String them along. Take all the money he's going to offer and just quit him when there's no more. . . . Older players will tell you: Take money from agents, alumni, anybody who will give it to you; take all the money they'll give you." Sums up Harris: "This is how the world works: Everybody is trying to get over on somebody."

Harris alleges that Walters and Bloom not only threatened violence against his "football-playing buddies," but also talked about having Mafia connections. "They've got friends in Las

Vegas," Harris claims. "Tough friends. They told me about their Mafia people. I heard Lloyd talk about one of them. We were at the Beverly Hills Hotel, in the lobby. He pointed to a guy and said, 'That dude's in the Mafia. He owns a casino in Las Vegas.' Lloyd said it to me in a quiet voice. He then said, 'But don't say anything.'"

Bloom denies that he knows any members of the Mafia. Walters calls reports that he was responsible for threats against players "a tremendous affront to my dignity" and also denies published reports that he may have provided drugs or prostitutes to players. "Right now if somebody in this show business life—the fast lane—asked me 'do you know a prostitute?' I would have to find out, 'does somebody know one somewhere,'" Walters told *The Washington Post*. Of suggestions that he has organized-crime ties, Walters says, "I don't even know what the word Mafia is. I've never met anybody like that."

But those last statements call into question Walters's veracity. There is, first of all, his onetime involvement in Norby Walters' Supper Club. "I don't have any idea if mob people hung out at my club," he says. But Norby's brother, Walter, says, matter-of-factly, "All five [New York Mafia] families were well represented. We were friends with all of them. They were good customers." Walter Walters also recalls that the men whose slayings resulted in the club's closing in 1968, Bruni and Parisi, were underlings of a reputed major Mafia figure, Carmine Lombardozi, who was present at the time of the shootings. Walter Walters says that after the gunfire ended, Norby grabbed Lombardozi and took him out through a passageway that led to the Copacabana.

Norby Walters is no more forthcoming in discussing his relationship with Michael Franzese, a capo in the Colombo crime family who is currently serving a 10-year sentence in federal prison in Terminal Island, Calif., and his stepfather, John (Sonny) Franzese, a Colombo family member. Sonny, convicted in 1967 of conspiracy to commit bank robbery, is in a Petersburg, Va., federal prison for parole violation. Walters told SI that he has known the Franzeses for years but said he had "never been out social, not even once," and had never done any business with either of them.

Walters also claimed he had only "a nodding acquaintance" with Michael Franzese.

Interviewed by SI's Bruce Selcraig in prison, however, Michael Franzese said that he and his stepfather were lifelong friends of Walters and his family, that the two families had frequently socialized and once vacationed together. The 36-year-old Franzese said that as a child he knew Walters as "Uncle Norby." Franzese also said that Walters asked for his help in either late 1983 or early 1984 when Norby was trying unsuccessfully to become the booking agent for

players. Harris says the trips to New York and L.A. contributed to his becoming academically ineligible at Texas. Mott, racked by guilt over his acceptance of money, found himself withdrawing, lying to his closest friends. His fiancée didn't approve of his involvement with Walters. When she found out that Mott had paid for her \$200 engagement ring with money from Walters, she threw the ring away, Mott says.

Mott's performance on the field may have suffered as well. "It [the money] killed a very important drive," says his current adviser, the Reverend Ken

months, even years. Bloom may be decertified by the NFLPA for his conduct, meaning he cannot negotiate contracts for anyone except rookies, who at present are not governed by the NFLPA. Bloom says if he is decertified, he will sue the NFLPA. Walters, who was certified in 1985 but no longer is, says, "I don't feel like being governed by other institutions." If the NFLPA extends its authority to include the contracts of rookies, as it wants to, Walters and Bloom could be shut out of football.

It's astonishing that Walters and Bloom remain on speaking terms, let alone partners. Walters groans that the day he met Bloom "will go down in infamy." Asked how he could ally himself with a man he has described as a loudmouth and "a loose cannon," Walters says, "I really must have been out of my mind. It seemed like a good idea at the time." Yet the two vow to continue in the sports-agenting business, and to succeed on a grand scale. "My relationship with Norby right now is very good," Bloom said last week. He said he speaks with Walters three or four times a day and dismisses Norby's criticism of him by saying, "I just take heed. I always watch my own back. Norby can say things sometimes that he doesn't mean."

"Please, and I say please, don't paint me as a guy who's a bad-news bear," says Walters. "I've worked very hard for my [clients]. This [negative] press . . . is reaching right into my music business that I've spent my life putting together."

Walters claims he was swept into the vortex of a greed-based college sports system. "This is something I dipped my toe in, and all of a sudden I found myself being sucked in and couldn't stop because there's no way to stop," he says. "Whatever you're writing, write it so that it doesn't look like I'm throwing money at these kids like I'm some sort of madman, because I'm not. The dollars that I gave them, a couple of thousand at first, then \$200 here and \$100 here—you do that with 20 kids and you have [spent] several hundred thousand dollars. You know what you've got? You've got a stupid investment going."

Walters concludes: "You have yourself out on a limb investing so much more than you ever should have. Because the business doesn't deserve that kind of investment. Better to invest it in a McDonald's. A lot better." ■



McKEY WAS FINISHED AT ALABAMA BUT FOUND A HOME IN THE NBA

Michael Jackson's Victory Tour. Justice Department sources told SI that Walters was questioned by a federal prosecutor and acknowledged having discussed with Michael Franzese the Mafia man's possible involvement in the tour. Franzese also told SI he and Walters had discussed using some of Walters's music clients in films that he was producing. Nevertheless, Walters says, "I have nothing to do with the man—zero, zip, zero, zip, zero, zero. Now that's a lot of zeros I just gave you."

The decision to do business with Walters has brought trouble to a number of

Fairley. "A drive he had used as a motivation factor." Mott says Walters "always told me that by signing with him, I'd go higher in the draft." When the draft was held, Mott was not selected, but he signed as a free agent with Dallas. He left camp after two days.

The unhappiest people in all this, though, just might be Walters and Bloom. All but two of their original first-round clients—Palmer and the Raiders' No. 1 pick, John Clay, an offensive tackle from Missouri—have deserted them, and the two agents are likely to be involved in lawsuits and investigations for