

Money, Music, Fast Lane

How agents **Walters** and Bloom lured college clients

By Danny Robbins and Manny Topol

Laverne Caldwell keenly remembers the day New York-based agents **Norby Walters** and **Lloyd Bloom** came to her home in Fort Smith, Ark., during the summer of 1985. **Walters** and **Bloom** were expanding their operation from entertainment to sports, and Laverne Caldwell's son, Ravin, a defensive end at the University of Arkansas who was entering his senior season, was their interest that day. The New Yorkers made quite an impression in Fort Smith.

"They were just, you know, great talkers," Laverne Caldwell said. "They could sit here and talk and talk and talk."

At first, Laverne and Ravin Caldwell told **Walters** and **Bloom** they weren't interested. The agents left the house. But they returned later in the day, and when they left again, they had Ravin Caldwell's signature on a representation agreement. Ravin Caldwell had \$2,500, according to his mother, a cash loan from **Walters** and **Bloom**.

"The little money sounded good to Ravin," Laverne Caldwell said, "but we really didn't need it."

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For **Walters** and **Bloom**, Laverne Caldwell's living room was just another stop in a three-year quest to scoop up athletic talent. And from town to town, from Fort Wayne to Fort Smith, their method of operation was pretty much the same. They used huge outlays of cash, their music connections and the bright lights of New York City to persuade athletes to sign with them. In all cases, the athletes were black, and often they came from poor backgrounds.

While **Walters** and **Bloom** admit to signing dozens of college athletes before the athletes' eligibility had expired, a violation of NCAA rules, they deny more serious allegations that have prompted inquiries by the FBI and a federal grand jury in Chicago. The grand jury is investigating the business practices of **Walters** and **Bloom** and their firm, World Sports & Entertainment Inc., and is looking into allegations that the agents threatened former clients with violence for breaking contracts and used drugs as a lure to sign athletes. About 60 former and current college athletes have been subpoenaed to testify.

Typically, a player signing with **Walters** and **Bloom** received an immediate payment, usually \$2,500, followed by monthly payments sent via Western Union. Amounts of the monthly payments varied according to the player's demands and his likely future value. The money usually was considered a loan that the player would repay upon signing with a professional team, and the standard WS&E contract contained a promissory note as an addendum to the representation agreement.

In an interview with Newsday, Ravin Caldwell, now with the Redskins, confirmed receiving the \$2,500, and said he received additional payments of varying amounts from WS&E during his senior year at Arkansas. He said he received between \$5,000 and \$6,000, money that was repaid, he said, when he signed with the Redskins.

Similarly, Vikings tight end Carl Hilton told Newsday he signed with **Walters** and **Bloom** in August, 1985, a few weeks before the start of his senior season at the University of Houston; received \$2,500 at that time for signing and used the money as a down payment on a Ford Bronco. Hilton said he then received monthly payments of \$500 from WS&E and wound up owing the agents about \$13,000, the entire amount of the signing bonus he received as a seventh-round draft choice of the Vikings.

Walters and **Bloom** also provided athletes with trips to New York. In some instances, athletes made the trips while they were being recruited by the agents; in other instances, athletes made the trips after they had signed with them. In all cases, **Walters** and **Bloom** paid for airfare and lodging, usually at the Novatel Hotel, a midtown Manhattan hotel near the WS&E offices.

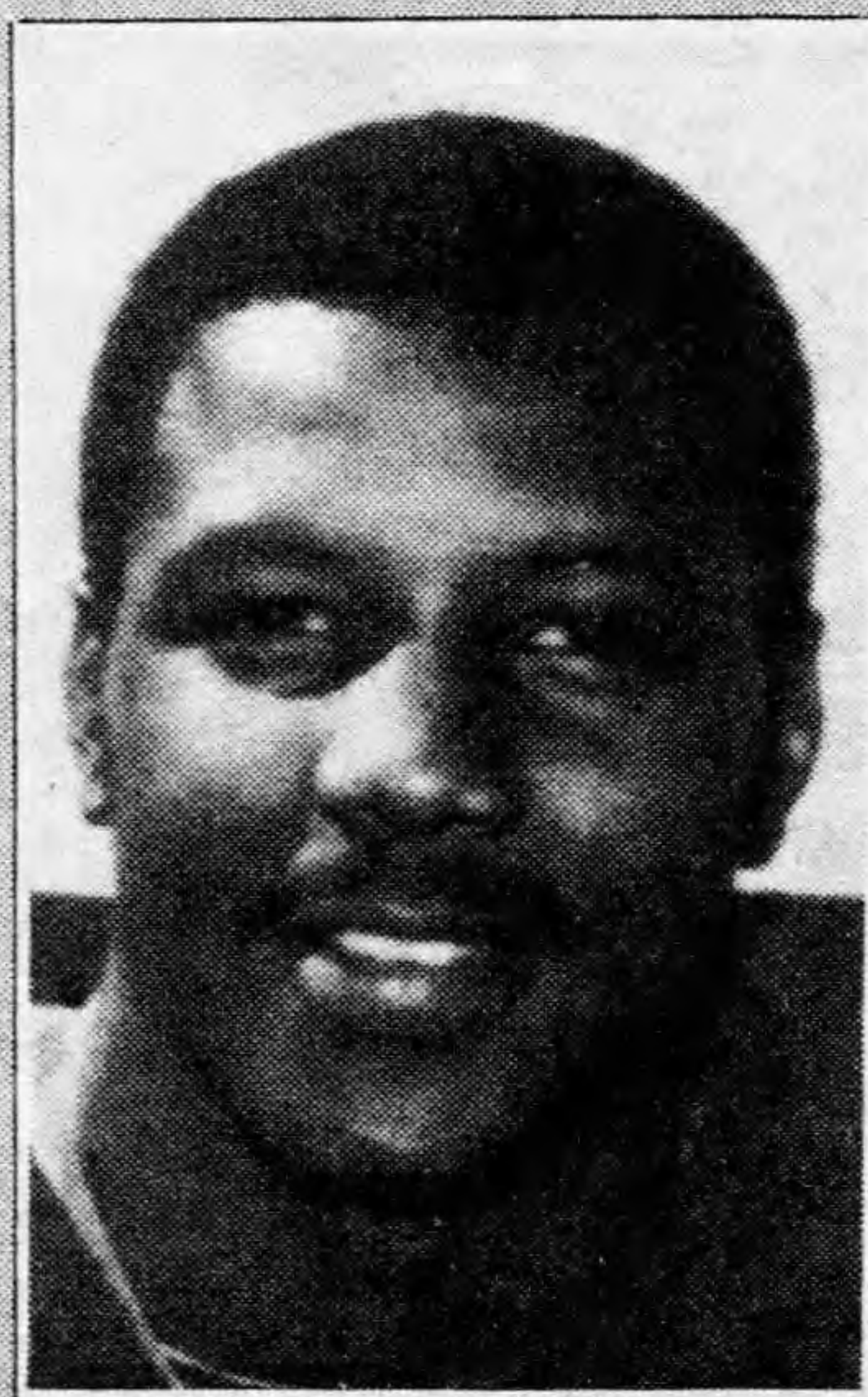
Hilton said he made two trips to New York at WS&E expense, once in March, 1985 — when **Walters** and **Bloom** were recruiting him — and

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Photo by Atlanta Journal and Constitution

Agent **Norby Walters** used cash and music connections to impress young black athletes



Byron Linwood

'Uncle Norby was smooth. I never thought I would get swept off my feet like that — you know, just talking. But that's the way it is with the guy if you listen to him long enough.'

— Byron Linwood

'Uncle Norby Was Smooth'

'They were . . . great talkers. They could sit here and talk and talk and talk.'

— Laverne Caldwell, mother of Ravin Caldwell



Ravin Caldwell

How Agents Lured Athletes

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again in January, 1986, after his senior season at Houston. Caldwell said he visited New York at WS&E expense shortly after his senior season at Arkansas. During that trip, Caldwell said, the agents told him they could make women available to him. "They said they knew a lot of them," he said. "I said no, I wasn't interested."

Based on information from a source close to the FBI investigation, Newsday has reported that the FBI knows that three former Southern Methodist University players — running back Jeff Atkins, defensive lineman Jerry Ball and wide receiver Ronald Morris — were brought to New York in December, 1985, by Walters and Bloom and set up with prostitutes, who then offered the players cocaine. The FBI believes, according to the source, it was on that trip and a subsequent trip to New York last summer, also paid for by Walters and Bloom, that Atkins, became addicted to cocaine. Atkins spent four weeks in a Dallas drug rehabilitation center in January.

Both Caldwell and Hilton said FBI agents asked them if drugs were involved in their dealings with Walters and Bloom, but both players said they told the FBI that they had no such dealings. Both players said that they have been subpoenaed to testify before the federal grand jury.

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Beyond the money and the trips was an understanding that Walters — a booking agent for such leading recording artists as Luther Vandross, Janet Jackson, Patti LaBelle and Whitney Houston — could deliver a life in the fast lane.

"They said Ravin would be able to earn money by representing different people," Laverne Caldwell said. "Like Coca-Cola. He could be a spokesman for them."

Occasionally, Walters would show athletes he was recruiting a Billboard magazine article describing his work in the entertainment field. Anthony Beverley, a former SMU linebacker, remembers being shown the article when Walters and Bloom took him to dinner at a Dallas seafood restaurant in early 1985, after his junior season.

"That's pretty impressive, somebody representing those type of people, stars," Beverley said. At the dinner, Beverley said, Walters and Bloom offered to give him \$2,500 on the spot and monthly payments of an undetermined amount if he would sign. Beverley, who left the Seahawks' camp in '85 and now works at a Dallas restaurant, said he didn't sign with WS&E until he quit the SMU team during spring practice later that year.

In documents filed in superior court in California, Reggie Rogers, the former University of Washington defensive end who is suing Walters for fraud, recounts Walters' appearance at Rogers' home in Sacramento, Calif., in December, 1986. Walters introduced himself, the documents state, as "an agent for numerous famous black musical artists," took the Rogers family to dinner and then returned to their home to speak to them further.

"At the climax of his 'sales pitch,' the documents state, Walters produced a contract and a stack of money out of his briefcase. Stating, 'I came prepared,' Walters spread \$5,000 cash across the floor of the Rogers' living room."

A week later, Rogers, the Lions' first-round draft choice this year, signed with WS&E and accepted the money, the documents state.

In explaining why he signed with Walters and Bloom, Hilton said: "It wasn't really the money. I felt like they

were pretty good agents. They had connections. They were saying they were representing Luther Vandross and all them. That kind of makes you think. It's who you know, not really what you know. As it turns out, I believe they were concert promoters."

Byron Linwood, a former defensive back at Texas Christian, said he met Walters and Bloom in the fall of 1984, early in Linwood's senior season, and was told by the agents that they were just beginning to move from entertainment to sports. "But they said selling an athlete is like selling music," Linwood said. And they reinforced that idea by providing him with free concert tickets throughout the year, he said. He signed with WS&E in December, 1984, he said, before TCU played in the Bluebonnet Bowl that year, and immediately received \$2,000. But the agents stopped returning his phone calls after he was cut by the Raiders the following summer, he said.

"Uncle Norby was smooth," said Linwood, who now works as a jailer at the Tarrant (Texas) County jail. "I never thought I would get swept off my feet like that — you know, just talking. But that's the way it is with the guy if you listen to him long enough, especially as naive as my mom and I were about the entertainment business. I knew nothing about agents and how they operate."

But some athletes refused to be swept away by it all.

Sean Smith, a defensive end from Grambling who was a fourth-round pick of the Bears in this year's draft, told The New Orleans Times-Picayune that he became wary of Walters and Bloom when they visited his home in Bogalusa, La., last summer.

"I saw what my brother went through with agents, so I knew what to look for," he said. His brother, Robert Smith, also a former Grambling defensive end, currently is with the Cowboys. "They [Walters and Bloom] were putting on an image that they were black. These two white guys trying to be soul brothers. The handshakes they were using went out in the '60s. They tell you they'll give you money if you sign. They know I'm at a black university, not eating good, no social money. They offered me a couple of thousand if I'd sign a promissory note. I didn't want to be with them."

Gene Burrough, general manager of the New Jersey Generals and Houston Gamblers in the United States Football League, said Walters offered him an annual salary of \$150,000 and a new car, a Jaguar, to join WS&E as a recruiter last November.

According to Burrough, who recruited for agent/dentist Jerry Argovitz before Argovitz became a part owner of the Gamblers, Walters was claiming at

that time to have already signed 40 college football players who were eligible for the 1987 draft. Burrough said he could see trouble ahead for Walters and declined the offer to recruit for him.

Burrough, one of the few blacks to move up in pro football management, said he also could see through the sales pitch that Walters had been giving the athletes.

"He may not admit it now, but he admitted to me that two years ago he didn't even know the difference between a running back and a pulling guard," said Burrough, who now, back in the agent business, represents one of Walters' former clients, former Clemson running back Kenny Flowers, drafted in the second round this year by the Falcons. "He's really a promoter and a salesman, and he's selling something to the young black kids that they all understand. They love music. If a guy comes into a black kid's home with a spread of himself in pictures with all these idols that these black kids have listened to all through high school and college, that's got to be impressive. These super acts that these black kids have grown up admiring and respecting, the kids all think they [the entertainers] are very rich and well taken care of. All you read about is how great they're doing, how much money they make. It's easy for a kid to say, 'Well, if this guy [Walters] did all this for Luther [Vandross] and Run-DMC, and Janet Jackson, hell, he could sure take care of my little money I'm going to make as a football player.'

"It's an easy sales pitch, no question about it. I could see how he could sign 40 guys. He asked me how many more I could sign. Hell, with that kind of rap, if that's all I was trying to do, I imagine I could sign a lot, too. But I'm a football man, not a music man."

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The standard WS&E contract calls for the player to pay the agents 6 percent of the total value of the player's pro contract within three days of the signing of the contract.

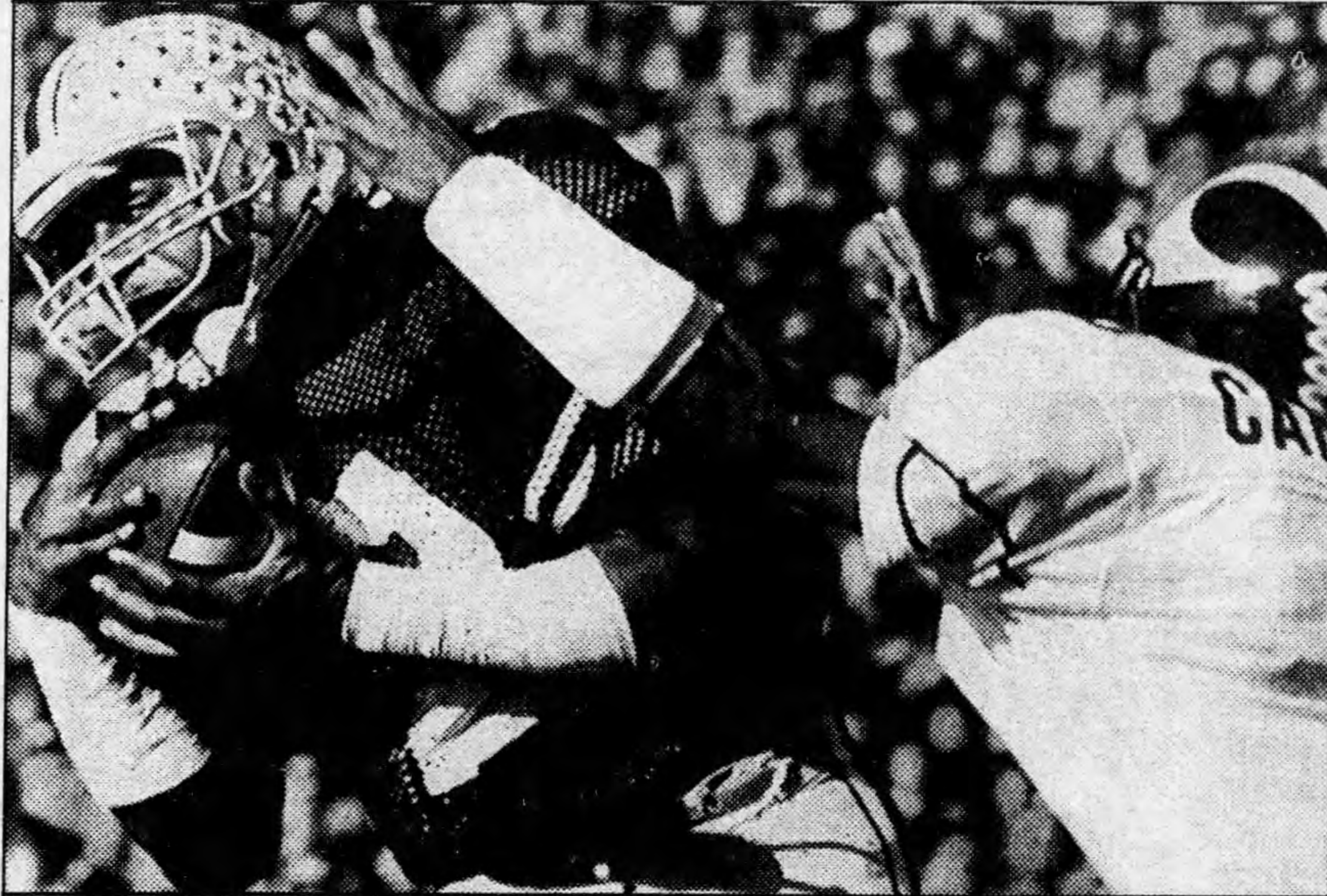
NFL Players Association officials and a number of agents believe such a practice — an agent's taking his entire fee off the top — is wrong.

"It's against what I feel is correct to charge a player for services you haven't performed yet," said Joe Senkovich of Longwood, Fla., the agent for a former WS&E client, former Michigan running back Bob Perryman, a third-round pick of the Patriots this year. "No. 2, if the player gets injured and doesn't get paid for the second or third year for some reason, he's already paid his fee to the agent, and, boy, he's screwed. And, third, it's just against NFLPA thought that an agent would add all the years up."

In Senkovich's view, players who sign under such circumstances "sell their souls in advance for \$5,000." The standard WS&E contract also gives the agents power of attorney over the player's interests.

In Ravin Caldwell's case, he said he hasn't seen any of the \$40,000 bonus he received as a fifth-round choice of the Redskins last year. Caldwell said he was told by Walters that the money was placed in a certificate of deposit, but Caldwell said he has no records for the CD. After a year of suffering in silence, Caldwell now says he was "stupid" for signing with WS&E.

Meantime, in Fort Smith, Laverne Caldwell refers to Walters and Bloom as "con artists" and talks about hiring a lawyer to look into their handling of her son's affairs. "Ravin was afraid he couldn't go to school if he made all this known last spring," she said. "His heart was broken. Mine was, too. He just didn't know. He's young."



AP Photo

The NFL will draft ineligible all-America receiver Cris Carter, left

NFL to Hold Draft For Ineligible Pair

The Associated Press

The NFL yesterday announced a supplemental draft will be held Aug. 28 for Ohio State all-America wide receiver Cris Carter and Pittsburgh running back Charles Gladman, who lost their college eligibility for improper dealings with agents.

In making the announcement, an NFL spokesman said the league will hold the draft because it cannot "act as the NCAA's enforcement arm."

Carter and Gladman had petitioned the NFL to hold a supplemental draft for them after they lost their NCAA eligibility.

"While we have made this decision reluctantly, it is simply not feasible for the NFL to attempt to act as the NCAA's enforcement arm in assuring college athletes'

compliance with NCAA rules," the spokesman said in a statement. "We have advised the NCAA and other interested parties of our decision and offered to work with them in an effort to deal more effectively with agent abuses."

Carter and Gladman were stripped of their final year of eligibility for signing with and accepting money from New-York based agents Norby Walters and Lloyd Bloom in violation of NCAA rules.

Ohio State athletic director Rick Bay said the NFL had created a dangerous precedent under which players will be applying for early eligibility before fulfilling their academic requirements.

The supplemental draft order is determined by lottery, weighted in favor of teams with the poorest records in 1986.