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Sports spectacular: agents' trial

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A Super Bowl of courtroom pyrotechnics will ignite in the upcoming trial of two agents who allegedly were the mob's entree into professional sports. U.S. Attorney Anton R. Valukas will take on defense attorney Dan K. Webb, who preceded Valukas as Chicago's top federal prosecutor.

Although good friends away from the legal arena, they will throw down the gauntlet before a courtroom packed with spectators, journalists and sports groupies starting Feb. 27 in Room 1742 of the Dirksen Federal Building.

Refereeing the titans will be U.S. District Judge George M. Marovich.

This high-profile case charges sports agents **Norby Walters**, 59, and **Lloyd Bloom**, 30, with using cash and threats of violence to secure bargaining rights from a number of college athletes, including Bears wide receiver Ron Morris and defensive back Maurice Douglass.

Morris and Douglass were told by the agents that someone would break their legs if they dared sign with other agents, authorities charge.

The indictment also charges that **Walters** and **Bloom** offered college athletes cash, interest-free loans, cars, clothes and airline tickets to sign with them. Collegiate rules require student athletes be unpaid amateurs.

Prosecutors had cut a deal with 43 former student athletes, who agreed to pay back tuition and fees received after they falsely signed certificates saying they were amateurs.

Some athletes, including the two Bears, are expected to testify.

Walters has admitted giving money to college athletes but denied any criminal wrongdoing. If convicted, both agents face 70 years in prison and \$2 million in fines.

The indictment also charges **Walters** and **Bloom** were business associates of Michael **Franzese**, reputed member in New York's Colombo organized crime family.

Currently serving 10 years for **racketeering, Franzese**, 37, allegedly bankrolled the agents to help them entice athletes to sign over their rights in professional contract negotiations.

As one of the wealthiest mob bosses in America, yuppie-Mafioso **Franzese** invested \$50,000 in **Walters** and **Bloom's** agency, World Sports & Entertainment Inc., and received cash payments in return, the indictment charges.

Franzese, an unindicted co-conspirator mentioned 15 times in the indictment, has given leads on major gangsters and turned against **Walters** and **Bloom**.

The FBI investigation began March, 1987, when we received a call that led us to discover the brutal beating of Kathy Clements, an associate of Chicago sports agent Steve Zucker.

The beating - in Zucker's Skokie office - took place after Clements received a threatening phone call from a man purporting to be a business rival of Zucker, Skokie police said.

Zucker represented players who had quit the **Walters** and **Bloom** organization.

After talking with Zucker, who was in Palm Springs, Calif., we called the Chicago FBI's second-in-command, Bob Walsh. Walsh arranged to have two of his top agents, George Randolph and Diane Benson, meet with Zucker.

From there, their 18-month investigation produced a case involving charges of **extortion**, mail **fraud**, **racketeering**, perjury and obstruction of justice.

Clements, 33, the wife of Canadian League football player Tom Clements, is expected to be a

star witness. Her assailant, described as a hulking, 6-foot man wearing a ski mask, is still unknown.

For sports fans hungry for new thrills, this trial promises to be the best game in town.

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