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College football on trial with sports agents

By Adrienne Drell March 5, 1989 Publication: Chicago Sun-Times Page: 4 Word Count: 626

The issue of whether college football really is an amateur sport will go on trial this week along with sports agents **Norby Walters** and **Lloyd Bloom**. U.S. Attorney Anton R. Valukas and assistants Howard Pearl and Helene Greenwald have provided a peek at their case with a witness list that includes the presidents and top athletic officials at seven universities: the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, Temple University, Miami of Ohio, the University of **Iowa**, Purdue University and the University of Notre Dame.

This high-powered academic cast will be called to testify about alleged **frauds** perpetrated on their institutions by the sports agents.

The two defendants, who are charged with **racketeering**, mail **fraud** and conspiracy, are accused of plying the athletes with cash, luxurious cars, interest-free loans, trips and expensive clothes to sign up as clients.

The students then signed professional contracts before their collegiate eligibility had expired, in violation of National Collegiate Athletic Association rules.

Although 43 football and basketball stars signed statements sent through the mail to the NCAA that they were in compliance with the NCAA rules, none was charged with mail **fraud**. Instead, they made special deals with the government to pay back tuition scholarships.

Defense attorneys, however, plan to question the alleged victimization of the seven "defrauded" universities. They will call many of the 43 athletes who attended schools whose own payoff systems may have rivaled those of the sports agents.

Robert Gold, Ethan Levin-Epstein and Matthew Kennelly, representing Walters, and Dan Webb, Steven Molo and George Lombardi, representing Bloom, also plan to call Texas Gov. William Clements, sports agent Sherwood Blount and former sports agent and Indianapolis Colts coach Ron Meyer to show how colleges played the same game as sports agents.

Clements, formerly on the board of regents at Southern Methodist University in Dallas; Blount, a noted alumnus, and Meyer, then a coach, all were part of a 1986 scan Pete Clements Rozelle dal in which SMU was suspended for two years from football competition.

This "death penalty" came after revelations that 13 players had received more than \$60,000 in being recruited by the university.

Many of the students who signed on with Bloom and Walters attended institutions of higher learning that also were suspended for compensating star athletes.

The defense hopes to take advantage of this

clean-vs.-dirty-school dilemma during the trial as it questions how the seven victimized universities were defrauded.

Perhaps anticipating this line, prosecutors last month quietly dropped counts from the indictment that cited alleged cases of fraud against the University of Illinois and Fort Hays State University in Kansas. Illinois has been reprimanded for recruiting violations.

Fort Hays was not a member of the NCAA during the period of time covered in the indictment.

Defense attorneys also may argue that none other than National Football League Commissioner Pete Rozelle engaged in the very same practices as Bloom and Walters.

They plan to call Rozelle, at the time general manager of the Los Angeles Rams, to testify about his methods in signing Billy Cannon, then a noted running back for Louisiana State University, to the Rams in 1959. According to court records, Rozelle secretly signed Cannon to

a professional contract before his collegiate eligibility had expired. Rozelle had Cannon register in a hotel under an assumed name and then gave him a \$10,000 check, the records show.

During preliminary arguments last week before U.S. District Judge George Marovich, Webb vowed to "prove college football is not really an amateur sport."

Webb said, "Some college administrators will testify with a holier-than-thou attitude that the players violated the principle of amateurism and therefore cheated the school out of scholarship money, encouraged by Walters and Bloom. I intend to attack that."

Judge Marovich, however, vowed, "We're going to have a criminal trial. We're not going to have a morality play."

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