

# Jury Hears Bid by Agent to Sign Iowa Star

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In a secretly recorded conversation, **Norby Walters**, an agent on trial here on Federal charges of mail fraud and racketeering, was heard persuading **Ronnie Harmon** to sign a contract in March of his junior year at the University of **Iowa**.

**Harmon's** signing of the contract was a violation of National Collegiate Athletic Association rules, which prohibit college athletes from entering into agreements with agents before their college eligibility expires.

**Walters** is heard saying on the tape that he would post-date the contract, would give **Harmon** a \$2,500 loan upon signing and would wire the athlete \$250 a month in **Iowa**. **Harmon** testified that **Walters**, in fact, did this.

Federal prosecutors played the tape recording of **Walters's** dealings with **Harmon**, now a running back with the Buffalo Bills, as part of the first day of testimony in the trial of **Walters** and his partner, **Lloyd Bloom**.

**Harmon** recorded the tape in 1985 at a meeting in the offices of the two agents after they had flown him to New York City from **Iowa**. When **Harmon's** father, who was also present, raised questions about the propriety of the early signing, **Walters** answered: "The whole thing hinges on some jive semantics. The point is, we won't tell."

Under cross-examination by **Bloom's** attorney, Dan Webb, **Harmon** said that over the next 15 months, the agents made payments to him totaling \$54,000, including \$1,000 for arranging to allow **Bloom** to call **Harmon's** teammate, Devon Mitchell, about representation. During that period, with **Harmon** playing a starring role, **Iowa** won the Big Ten championship and played in the 1986 Rose Bowl. The

agents eventually did represent Mitchell.

**Harmon** admitted that university records indicated he was academically ineligible to play that season. According to Webb, the university nevertheless allowed Harmon to play in violation of conference rules.

Under further cross-examination, **Harmon** testified that he dismissed **Walters** and Bloom in the middle of contract negotiations with the Bills, and that he repaid only \$5,000 of the \$54,000 that the agents had advanced him.

"You took the famous **Norby Walters** for \$49,000?" said Webb.

"How could I take him to the cleaners?" replied **Harmon**, explaining that **Walters** in his own words had characterized their agreement as a gamble.

**Walters's** discussions with **Harmon** to get him to agree to that gamble were peppered with references to the black entertainers **Walters** had represented. Harmon is black.

"I'm the number one salesman of black entertainment in the world today," **Walters** told Harmon on the tape, explaining he had consummated numerous "multi, multi mega-million deals," and was now ready to join forces with **Bloom**, whom he described as a "football fanatic."

**Harmon** testified that he believed what he did was wrong and that he had made a deal with the Government under which he would not be indicted in return for testifying truthfully, repaying the scholarship money paid by the University of **Iowa** and performing 250 hours of community service. He told the prosecution that after receiving the payments, he knowingly provided false information to the university and Big Ten Conference when filling out N.C.A.A. forms before his senior year.

He did so, he explained, so that he would not lose his scholarship, his eligibility to play football or cause the school to be penalized by the N.C.A.A., because he had signed with an agent and accepted money.

Throughout his cross-examination, Webb focused on **Harmon's** contention that he had in some way defrauded the university by falsely filling out the forms. Webb led **Harmon** through an explanation of his college transcript, noting that he had not taken any courses in his declared major of communications until his senior year, with the exception of an American film course that he had failed. In noting that Harmon had taken such courses as billiards and coaching football, Webb seemed to be suggesting that **Harmon** had not entered the university to pursue a degree, but merely to play football. This seemed to reinforce the avowed intention of the defense to put college football on trial.

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