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Iowa didn't bend rules for athletes, agents' trial told

By Adrienne Drell March 9, 1989 Publication: Chicago Sun-Times Page: 20 Word Count: 438

The assistant athletic director of the University of Iowa insisted Wednesday that the school did not bend academic standards to keep its star athletes eligible to play football. However, Fred Mims admitted that former Iowa Hawkeyes players Ronnie Harmon and Devon Mitchell were placed on academic probation prior to the 1985 season in which Iowa went to the Rose Bowl. Harmon is now with the Buffalo Bills, and Mitchell plays for the Detroit Lions.

Mims, under cross-examination in the fraud trial of sports agents Norby Walters and Lloyd Bloom, said that Harmon's academic adviser warned in September, 1985, that Harmon "was still not working toward a degree," that he had taken no upper level courses in pursuit of a major and "that this semester is a disaster."

Dan Webb, one of Bloom's three attorneys, was trying to show that the university was not defrauded of the youth's scholarship money by the agents because the school itself had violated Big 10 academic rules and standards.

Mims testified before an eight-women, four-man jury that the Big 10 required all students on athletic scholarships to have a minimum cumulative gradepoint average of 1.85 at the end of their junior year.

He also said athletes were required to be "qualitatively and quantitatively" progressing toward

a degree.

Webb displayed a copy of Harmon's transcript, which he said indicated that Harmon's grade point average was 1.69 at the end of his junior year.

But Byron Gregory, attorney for the Big 10 and the University of Iowa, told reporters later outside Devon Mitchell

the courtroom that Harmon's cumulative grade point average was in fact 1.96 at that time.

He said, "It would appear Webb's computation did not take into account (some) courses appearing on Harmon's transcript" and only recorded the grade average for one semester.

Webb elicited that Harmon took only one course over three years in computer science, his original major. Harmon, who later changed his major to communications, did poorly in that field and then switched to a general studies. He never graduated.

Mitchell's grades were also low and at one point even descended to a 1 on a scale of 4, according to Mims' testimony. This was despite attempts by Mitchell to raise his score by taking karate, billiards, bowling, tennis and jogging.

Gregory disputed these figures as well and pointed out the university registrar had certified Mitchell as eligible for play throughout his five-year college career.

The only course in which Mitchell received an A, according to Mims, was intercollegiate football, for which he received credit for a degree.

But Mims maintained that both athletes were qualified to play ball and keep their scholarships.

Ronnie Harmon Academic probation told

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