

← Back

2 athletes admit agents paid them during college

By Adrienne Drell March 10, 1989 Publication: Chicago Sun-Times Page: 3 Word Count: 469

Detroit Lions defensive back Devon Mitchell and New England Patriots running back Robert Perryman testified Thursday they took money from two sports agents to help support their families while they were in college. Both athletes acknowledged the cash and post-dated representation agreements with the agents violated college amateur player rules. But they vehemently denied committing a federal crime.

"You're talking about all these crimes as if I was selling drugs or something. The only thing I had done wrong was violate NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) rules," Perryman told a federal jury.

The players were among three witnesses testifying in the trial of Lloyd Bloom and Norby Walters, who are charged with federal conspiracy, racketeering and mail fraud in the alleged defrauding of seven universities.

Mitchell, Perryman and Rod Woodson of the Pittsburgh Steelers have agreed to repay scholarships to their schools since they secretly signed with the agents, breaking NCAA rules.

But under cross examination by defense attorneys Thursday, each man refused to call his actions fraud.

"I didn't feel like I was cheating," Mitchell said, recalling his June, 1985, agreement with Bloom and Walters and the \$14,000 in cash and gifts he received while on scholarship at the University of Iowa.

Mitchell was married while in college, but his wife and daughter remained in Brooklyn. So when Bloom and Walters handed him a contract in 1985 (postdated to January, 1986, when his eligibility expired), and spread \$2,000 on a coffee table with promises of more, Mitchell said he had no problem accepting.

"In my opinion, I was just borrowing against my future. The way I look at it, it was my money anyway," said Mitchell, 26, who eventually paid back the agents.

In other testimony Thursday, Mitchell admitted occasionally borrowing a car from an Iowa booster, which also violated NCAA rules.

Perryman, who signed with the agents at the end of his junior year at the University of Michigan in 1986, admitted that coach Glenn "Bo" Schembechler drilled into players they "were out" if they ever violated the NCAA rules.

Nevertheless, Perryman said he signed with the agents in June, 1986, and accepted \$2,000 on the spot, with promises of an additional \$250 a month to help support his daughter.

"It would help me out with my child," said Perryman, who later tried to fire the agents in March, 1987.

Perryman said he "terminated them" in April after Schembechler suddenly confronted him about the prohibited contract.

Bloom, in an emergency visit to Ann Arbor, suggested Perryman sign a new contract to conceal the earlier deal, he testified.

When he refused, Perryman said Bloom threatened to disclose their relationship, which he claimed could result in Michigan's forfeiture of its 1986 Big Ten Championship.

Woodson, who was an All American track and football player at Purdue, accepted about \$20,000 from the agents, which he admitted has not been repaid.

Chicago Sun-Times

Date: March 10, 1989

Page: 3

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