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Mobster testifies he funded sports agent

By Adrienne Drell March 15, 1989 Publication: Chicago Sun-Times Page: 22 Word Count: 379

A high-ranking mobster told federal jurors Tuesday he financed the efforts of agent **Norby Walters** to sign star college athletes to secret contracts. Michael **Franzese**, an admitted "capo" in New York's Colombo crime family, said he provided \$50,000 in seed money (concealed in a brown paper bag) to become a partner in Walter's World Sports & Entertainment Inc.

Franzese, 37, one of the most powerful organized crime members ever to testify for the government, took the stand in a well-guarded courtroom as the star prosecution witness against **Walters**.

In a 1984 conversation in Beverly Hills, Calif., **Franzese** said, **Walters** announced he would be going into the sports agent business, pursuing black athletes.

"I'm interested," **Franzese** said he told **Walters**.

And in 1985 at a meeting in **Walters'** Manhattan offices, **Franzese** said he had his brother-in-law hand **Walters** a brown bag filled with \$50,000 in cash.

"Because of problems I had, I never carried money," **Franzese** explained.

Walters and his associate, **Lloyd Bloom**, are charged with lining up collegiate football players as clients with cash and expensive gifts and then using threats of violence when they wanted to

renege on their contracts.

Now serving a 10-year prison term on federal charges, Franzese testified under a grant of immunity that he also allowed Walters, 59, to exploit his reputation to muscle entertainment and sports clients who wanted to cancel contracts.

Franzese said he interceded in Walter's behalf three times to retain entertainment clients such as Michael Jackson and his brothers, singer Dionne Warwick and the New Edition rock group.

"Norby asked me to accompany him to make sure the act remained with him," said Franzese, recalling a 1982 visit to Warwick's agent. The agent kept Walters after the chat, Franzese said.

Acknowledging his well-publicized renown as a Colombo crime captain, Franzese said Walters "had laid the groundwork. He (the agent) knew who I was so there was no need to threaten him."

Franzese, who has 14 months left on his prison term, said he knew Walters "all my life."

His father, John "Sonny" Franzese, also a Colombo "capo," had been friends with Walters, a Brooklyn-based nightclub and restaurant owner, for more than 30 years, and the two families dined out and often vacationed together, Franzese recalled.

Walters' attorney, Robert Gold, attacked Franzese's credibility, trying to show he wants to reduce his jail term and fine.

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