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Agents' trial could spark NCAA change

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The federal fraud trial of New York sport agents Norby Walters and Lloyd Bloom at the Dirksen Federal Building is only one-third complete. But it already has produced some fallout in the college sports community. Whether the continuing revelations by witnesses in the courtroom of U.S. District Judge George Marovich will do anything to change the conduct of collegiate athletics remains a big question mark.

Last week brought the following developments:

The University of Iowa declared Ray Thompson academically ineligible to play in the NCAA basketball tournament. Thompson, a graduate of Argo High School in southwest suburban Summit, is a freshman forward.

The university denied the move was a result of criticism it received after revelations during the trial. Criticism centered on former Iowa football star Ronnie Harmon, who played his senior year while on academic probation and apparently was not making "qualitative and quantitative progress toward a degree," in violation of Big Ten requirements. Devon Mitchell, also of Iowa, had a poor academic record but was allowed to continue playing.

Others view Thompson as a scapegoat

Thompson could not be reached for comment. The school's basketball department restricts players' telephones to guard against outside calls, officials said. Student reporters at the Daily **Iowan** said they had been unable to locate or talk to Thompson all week.

In Washington, Sen. Bill Bradley (D-N.J.) proposed a bill called the Student Athlete Right-to-Know Act. It would require any college that receives federal aid to publish the graduation rates of its athletes and its general student population.

The aim is to help high school seniors being offered athletic scholarships decide which college to attend.

Bradley, a former New York Knick who attended Princeton, noted that only one in every 10,000 college athletes turns professional.

Representatives Edolphus Towns (D-N.Y.) and Thomas C. McMillen (D-Md.) proposed the bill. Recruited athletes would have to indicate on their letters of intent that they had been informed of their chosen school's graduation rate.

McMillen was a highly recruited high school basketball player who attended the University of Maryland and played for 11 years in the NBA.

Hearings are expected to

take place this year before the Labor and Human Resources Committee headed by Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.).

Some believe that if **Walters** and **Bloom** are convicted on the **fraud, extortion** and mail **fraud** charges, they will merely be fall guys for a corrupt system.

"They're trying to paint these guys as the bad guys," said Dick DeVenizio of Charlotte, N.C., who used to advocate formation of a labor union for college players. "It's the standard modus operandi for the NCAA to blame individuals and let the system stay as it is."

DeVenizio said while some agents may exploit players for personal gain, most have been on the players' side, trying to counterbalance the enormous power the universities have over them.

"I'm not for breaking legs and all that, but in general the agents have been the players' friends

and the schools and the athletic departments have been the players' enemies," he said. "The NCAA has a classic cartel that prevents players from receiving their legitimate economic value."

DeVenzio advocates formation of a minor-league basketball system that would compete with the NCAA for players.

Don Canham, recently retired Michigan athletic director, said the NCAA's reputation won't improve in the near future because its members will not vote to stiffen academic standards.

"The college presidents haven't even got enough courage to make freshmen ineligible," said Canham. "The presidents won't bite the bullet and do it. The CEOs of these universities don't have the courage to make a decision in opposition to the insanity of the Barry Switzers."

Canham noted that the college presidents who serve on the NCAA board have refused to adopt the Big Ten academic standard requiring "qualitative and quantitative progress toward a degree."

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