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Payments to Bears' Morris told

By Adrienne Drell March 21, 1989 Publication: Chicago Sun-Times Page: 12 Word Count: 449

Defense attorneys Monday disclosed that Chicago Bears wide receiver Ron Morris received some \$16,000 in cash and a sports car from Southern Methodist University representatives during his college career. The revelation by attorney Dan Webb came in response to a government request to limit his questioning of Morris in the federal fraud trial of sports agents Norby Walters and Lloyd Bloom.

Morris had been expected to take the witness stand Monday to describe his relationship with the agents and how they allegedly threatened to break his legs if he ended a contract with them.

But the trial was delayed after Walters was knocked down by a cart in a Dirksen Federal Building elevator, injuring his right arm. He was treated at Northwestern Memorial Hospital and released. A representative said no bones were broken but that Walters, 58, was in pain. He did not return to court.

Details of Morris' role in a 1986 recruiting scandal, which resulted in the SMU football program being suspended, had never been disclosed before Monday.

Webb noted that Morris was "heavily recruited" while in high school with promises of "under-the-table payments" by SMU and later received \$400 a month and the car from unidentified school representatives while playing football there.

"If taking money is a violation, Ron Morris received money before Walters and Bloom were even on the scene," said Webb, who contends Morris "is a critical witness against Bloom."

U.S. District Judge George Marovich on Monday discussed ground rules for interrogating Morris and other witnesses when the trial resumes today.

U.S. Attorney Anton Valukas contends it would be irrelevant to bring up Morris' receipt of benefits while he was a college athlete.

Unlike more than 40 other student athletes that the government says were solicited as clients by Walters and Bloom in violation of National Collegiate Athletic Association rules, Morris was not accused of defrauding SMU of scholarship money, Valukas said.

Morris, who allegedly concealed the fact he received money from the agents, was one of 13 SMU football players named in a recruiting scandal. SMU's football program was suspended by the NCAA.

Court documents indicate that Morris signed up with the two agents in 1985 and received money from them while in school, but tried to break his post-dated contract in the fall of 1986.

Although Morris later agreed to repay the money, Bloom allegedly threatened to have his legs broken and his new agent's house blown up.

"You signed the contract," Bloom allegedly told Morris in a conversation he secretly taped, the documents show. "The money is not coming from Uncle Norby. It's coming out of the people in Los Angeles, Calif. They are bigger backers and, Ron, they're going to . . . break your legs and see that you don't play football again."

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