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Players tell of agents' threats

By Barry Cronin March 22, 1989 Publication: Chicago Sun-Times Page: 12 Word Count: 472

Two football players testified Tuesday that **Norby Walters** and **Lloyd Bloom** threatened to ruin them financially or physically if the players broke contracts with the sports agents. Defense attorneys argued, however, that some of the statements characterized by federal prosecutors as threats were pleas by **Walters** and **Bloom** that the players remain in the **Walters** client "family."

The defense also contended that alleged threats by **Bloom** were empty and were not taken seriously by the players.

Testifying for the government in the agents' federal **fraud** and **extortion** trial were linebacker Tony Woods of the Seattle Seahawks, formerly of the University of Pittsburgh; wide receiver Everett Gay of the Dallas Cowboys, formerly of the University of Texas, and Edwin Simmons, a former Texas player who was injured and never selected in the NFL draft. The players have been granted immunity from prosecution.

All three players signed with the agents before their college eligibility expired and accepted thousands of dollars from them, acts that violate NCAA rules.

The government contends that in signing the players too soon the agents **defrauded** the universities out of scholarship money it paid to the athletes while they actually were ineligible to play. All the athletes played anyway.

"During the course of my senior year I had heard rumors that **Norby** was supposed to be involved with the **Mafia** and involved with drugs," said Woods, sporting a goatee and a

modified Mohawk haircut. "I didn't want to be associated with that at all."

Woods acknowledged he never had seen any proof of mob or drug involvement by either man and that he did not believe the rumors. Nevertheless, he said, he did not want to be connected with the agents, fearing it might damage his career.

Woods also admitted he had taken \$8,000 from the agents, that his parents borrowed another \$6,000, and that his younger brother, Darrell, also a University of Pittsburgh football player, had received an airline ticket from the agents, an NCAA violation for which he could have been declared ineligible if exposed.

The prosecution then played a secretly taped 40-minute telephone conversation between Walters and Woods in which the high-pressure Walters exhorted Woods not to leave his agency or face public embarrassment and heavy expenses in "a major legal action."

Woods, who made the tape, fired Walters and Bloom, who later sued him. The suit was dropped.

Simmons said Bloom threatened to call on "our friends" in California or Las Vegas to make sure teammate Gay never played football again if he left the agents. Gay said he, too, received threats of violence from Bloom.

Walters himself was back in court Tuesday, his right arm in a sling, after he fell and injured his shoulder Monday in an elevator at the Dirksen Federal Building. Walters said he lost his balance after he caught the cuff of his pants on a cart.

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