

← Back

Walters' defense tactic fails

By Adrienne Drell March 28, 1989 Publication: Chicago Sun-Times Page: 16 Word Count: 281

Lawyers for sports agent **Norby Walters** were blocked Monday in their attempt to discredit the testimony of New York mobster Michael **Franzese**. U.S. District Judge George M. Marovich refused to allow **Walters'** attorneys to call singer Michael Jackson's father and others to testify about a threat **Franzese** allegedly made to eliminate a proposed tour by Jackson and his brothers.

An admitted member of the Colombo organized crime family in New York, **Franzese** had said he wanted the Jacksons to keep **Walters** on as an agent.

He had testified that he interceded on **Walters'** behalf at the 1981 meeting with Jackson's former manager, Ronald Weisner, during which the alleged threat was made.

As attorneys Robert Gold and Ethan Levin-Epstein opened their defense, they told Marovich their witnesses would attempt to refute **Franzese** by showing that the meeting was in 1980.

But Marovich ruled this testimony would be irrelevant because none of the witnesses in question were actually at the session.

Walter's co-defendant, **Lloyd Bloom**, also lost his bid for a mistrial Monday based on an argument that the government did not call Chicago Bears wide receiver Ron Morris to the stand, as promised in opening statements.

Bloom's attorney, Dan Webb, argued that jurors heard U.S. Attorney Anton Valukas - and not Morris - describe alleged threats by **Bloom** to have Morris' legs broken by unspecified parties

because he signed with another agent.

"Because Morris plays for the Chicago Bears, he was probably the most recognizable name of a witness for jurors," said Webb, accusing the government of unfairly trying to connect Bloom to mobster Franzese through Valukas' statements.

Marovich ruled that the opening statements were not prejudicial to the defense and ordered the trial to proceed.

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Date: March 28, 1989

Page: 16

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