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Told **Walters** contracts with students were legal: lawyers

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Attorneys from a prominent New York law firm said Wednesday they had assured agent **Norby Walters** that it was legal to sign student athletes before their college eligibility expired. The three lawyers, partners with Shea & Gould, a firm that represents the New York Yankees, Mets and the National Tennis Association, said they told **Walters** such agreements and any accompanying payments violated National Collegiate Athletic Association rules, but they did not violate the law.

"I told him it violated the rule of a private corporation - not a law," Lonny Trost, one of the lawyers told jurors in the **racketeering** and mail **fraud** trial of **Walters** and agent **Lloyd Bloom**.

Walters consulted the law firm in 1985 and 1986 about filing breach of contract suits against such football players as Tim McGee of the Cincinnati Bengals and Ronald **Harmon** of the Buffalo Bills because they hired other agents.

"I told him it would be a bad idea. He was likely to become a pariah. The NCAA would be mad at him, the universities would be mad at him and other students would be mad at him," attorney Michael Feldberg told the jury and U.S. District Judge George M. Marovich. Defense attorneys contend the lawsuits filed in February, 1987, did in fact realize Feldberg's worst fears.

"It also set in motion very, very powerful forces against Mr. Walters," his attorney Robert Gold has told jurors.

Federal prosecutors say Walters and Bloom defrauded at least seven universities out of scholarships awarded to athletes by enticing them to violate NCAA rules with cash, expensive gifts and post-dated contracts.

In other defense testimony Wednesday, the manager for the New Edition rhythm and blues group said self-styled mobster Michael Franzese delivered a proposal for a movie project - not a threat - during an Oct. 30, 1985, meeting.

The agent, Steve Machat, said Franzese accompanied Walters to his Manhattan office to discuss the film proposal.

"He did not threaten me. He didn't do anything that kept Norby on as the agent for the New Edition," Machat said in response to questioning by the prosecution.

The government contends Walters used Franzese to apply pressure on clients who wanted to fire him.

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