End Near in Trial Following Tribulations of Walters, Bloom

By Chris Mortensen Staff Writer

CHICAGO — There are just days left before a federal jury determines the fate of sports agents Norby Walters and Lloyd

Walters and Bloom, who signed 58 college football and basketball players from 1985 to 1987, rested their defense Thursday in a trial in which the two men face charges of racketeering, mail fraud, wire fraud and

Walters and Bloom put up just seven witnesses in three days of defense, including singer Dionne Warwick, who testified that despite dropping Walters as a booking agent in 1982 it is always "hugs and kisses" between the two.

U.S. District Judge George Marovich halted a potentially intriguing wave of witnesses by deeming their testimony irrelevant to the charges.

Bloom's lone witness was a linguist, Timothy Austin, who tried to differentiate between the meaning of "loan" and "compensation." But by the time Assistant U.S. Attorney Howard Pearl finished his crossexamination of Austin, the jury understood that the witness was being "compensated" for his testimony.

Walters's defense to the fraud charges focused on advice he received from lawyers from the New York firm of Shea and Gould.

The attorneys — Lonn Trost, Morris Shelton and Michael Feldberg — each testified that when Walters inquired whether he was doing "anything illegal" in signing college-eligible athletes, they told him he was violating NCAA rules, not laws.

"I told him he would likely become a pariah or outcast," Feldberg told the jury. "But I told him he was not breaking any

Feldberg is a civil and criminal lawyer and a one-time prosecutor under former U.S. Attorney Rudolph Giuliani in the Southern District of New York.

However, under cross-examination by U.S. Attorney Anton Valukas, Feldberg admitted Walters did not tell him that the agents were advising athletes to "lie" to their universities to receive scholarship benefits.

It was another word game played in the courtroom. Feldberg did say he assumed the agents's dealings with the athletes were being concealed.

It is the technical aspect of the fraud case that the attorneys are expected to dissect in closing arguments, probably Tuesday, to the eight-woman, four-man jury.

The government does not contend that agents paying college athletes is illegal, but it does consider fraudulent false statements

ment and sports. Though Walters did not testify, one of his own witnesses this past week confirmed the association of the agent and Franzes but denied he received a veiled threat as

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previously alleged in Franzese's testimony. Steven Machat, the former manager of the group New Edition, testified that Wal-

the athletes made on affidavits to receive

their scholarships each year. Therefore, the

government contends, the agents induced

the fraud through their relentless pursuit

of athletes with cash and contracts and the

Prosecutors are expected to hammer

Walters's alleged association with orga-

nized crime into the jury's mind. The gov-

testified that as a "capo" or "captain" in

the New York Colombo crime family, he

was a silent partner of Walters in entertain-

ernment's star witness, Michael Franzese

overt efforts to conceal the arrangement.

ters brought Franzese to a meeting in 1984. Machat said the New Edition was considering dropping Walters as a booking agent because the group wanted to do a film and, therefore, the job would belong to whatever agent secured the film.

Franzese, who did own a film production company, was at the meeting only to talk about a proposed film, and not to threaten the group's managers, Machat told the jury. Franzese has testified that his presence was needed to keep Walters as the agent.

"Franzese said he had a dream to remake the 'Dead End Kids,' and he wanted to use the New Edition," Machat testified. "He gave a pitch. He got into the conversation, using his hands. I thought it was moronic. I got up and left the room and let them talk to Rick Smith [a co-manager]."

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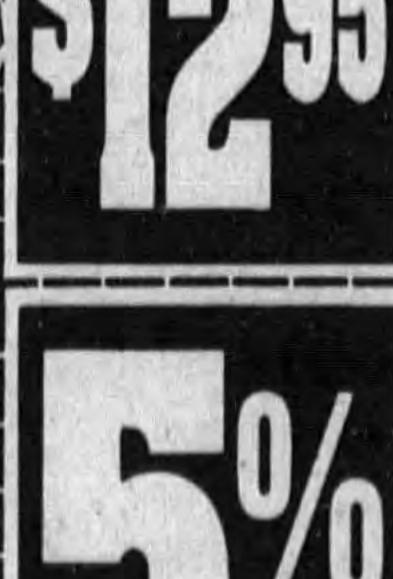
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