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Pair trampled rights of athletes, court told

By Adrienne Drell April 5, 1989 Publication: Chicago Sun-Times Page: 29 Word Count: 397

A federal prosecutor Tuesday branded sports agents **Norby Walters** and **Lloyd Bloom** as "two hustlers from New York" stampeding over the rights of athletes and colleges to sign up as many clients as possible. "They steamrolled the interests and rights of institutions or anyone standing in their way, whether it was legal or illegal," Assistant U.S. Attorney Howard Pearl said in closing arguments in the agents' **fraud** trial.

But Dan K. Webb, **Bloom's** attorney, warned jurors it would not be fair to turn the two men into "scapegoats for what's wrong with college football today."

The daylong arguments, to be followed by more today, conclude four weeks of evidence in the **racketeering**, conspiracy and mail **fraud** trial.

Pearl said **Walters**, 58, and **Bloom**, 29, cheated six universities out of "their right to allocate scholarship money" by signing up athletes before their eligibility expired.

And in "their mission to become agents to the stars and rise to the top of the world of sports," Pearl said, the two men used intimidation and threats of violence to keep clients.

Walters took advantage of a 20-year relationship with New York mobster Sonny **Franzese** and his son, Michael, to finance his sports agent business and keep the players on his rolls, Pearl

said.

Webb blasted the universities for "a holier-than-thou attitude" and insisted they were not **fraud** victims at all.

The schools themselves, Webb said, committed violations such as:

Overlooking a player's academic deficiencies.

Requiring athletes to spend 30 to 40 hours a week on the playing field to make millions of dollars for the schools.

Overlooking criminal convictions of players.

Allowing players to receive money and gifts from alumni "boosters."

Bloom and **Walters** may have violated National Collegiate Athletic Association rules, Webb said. "But that is not a crime," he declared.

The managers for singer Dionne Warwick and the New Edition music group denied being pressured by **Franzese** to keep **Walters** as a booking agent.

However, Pearl suggested this was due to fear and said Joseph Grant, Warwick's manager "who books acts into Las Vegas and Atlantic City, is not going to come in and say he had a meeting with an organized crime figure."

Webb reminded jurors his hot-tempered client had only met **Franzese** once. Phone calls like the one **Bloom** made to Chicago Bears safety Maurice Douglass threatening to "break his legs" resulted from **Bloom's** "frustration and anger," Webb said, not criminal intent.

Chicago Sun-Times

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