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'Court buffs' see agents' acquittal

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A newsletter for the Chicago Court Buffs is predicting a jury will deliver a not guilty verdict in the federal fraud-extortion case of sports agents Norby Walters and Lloyd Bloom. The court buffs are a group consisting primarily of retirees who have spent months and sometimes years observing the intricacies of federal courtroom action. The newsletter refers to them as a "shadow jury."

In its March 27 issue, the Courtwatchers Newsletter predicted the jurors would "nullify" the evidence against Walters and Bloom.

Instead of convicting them, the jurors would blame the universities for creating an environment conducive to wheeling and dealing, the letter said.

"Sometimes, if they (the jurors) think 'higher authorities' (in this case the universities) are the more culpable ones, they will nullify the evidence and the law, even though this issue is not relevant to the case," wrote Ray Suzuki, a writer for the publication.

"There is no doubt that these football jocks (13 players testified) and Walters and Bloom, as sports agents, were guilty of defrauding the universities of their grants-in-aid to the football players," the letter said.

"However, that intangible moral jury power called 'jury nullification' sometimes comes into play. . . . Jury nullification means: Even though juries are never so instructed, they are at

liberty to `nullify the law' by refusing to convict despite the evidence. . . ."

Closing arguments in the case began Tuesday and will conclude today in the courtroom of U.S. District Judge George M. Marovich, and a verdict could come later this week.

The Courtwatchers Newsletter is a humble-looking publication printed on 8 1/2-by-11-inch paper, has no advertising, and is photocopied for limited distribution around the federal courthouse.

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