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Guilt is shared in agents' trial

By TERRY BOERS April 17, 1989 Publication: Chicago Sun-Times Page: 9 Word Count: 642

Norby Walters and Lloyd Bloom are the kind of low-life cretins you shouldn't mind stepping on, even if what's left on your shoes would need to be scraped off while holding your nose. From the moment they first gained national notoriety after being charged with corruption involving college sports, I never heard one person say publicly there was any chance the two were innocent. We never found it difficult to believe they had used the lure of cash to entice poor, black athletes to sign with them before the end of their college eligibility.

And it certainly wasn't hard to believe this distasteful twosome threatened mob retaliation - through one Michael Franzese of New York - if their clients attempted to break the contracts or refused to repay the loans.

That the Chicago jury deliberated nearly 40 hours and six days before finding them guilty of racketeering, mail fraud and racketeering conspiracy last Thursday was, however, somewhat of a surprise. I thought the jury would have needed no more than 40 minutes to bring back such a verdict in the trial, which lasted five weeks and gave a whole new meaning to the term March Madness.

Knowing Walters and Bloom each face a maximum sentence of 55 years in prison and a \$1.5 million fine pleases me no end, although their battery of attorneys already has promised an appeal.

But as good as it is to see Walters and Bloom take the first big step toward the bighouse, I'm aware that the colleges and the athletes are hardly blameless. In fact, they're every bit as guilty.

That all the additional muck should be raked up in the waning days of this particular college year actually couldn't have been more appropriate.

From the start of the football season last fall, it seems we've been constantly bombarded with the often lurid tales of cheating from some of the country's most athletically prominent schools.

Kentucky basketball. Oklahoma football. Texas A&M football. Missouri basketball. Colorado football.

That each institution was found to be a cesspool to some degree didn't shock anyone who's been around the college scene, but I'm positive a lot of people who might not have been aware got themselves a quick education.

To watch how those five schools - and several others - handled their problems from an administrative standpoint tells you why the slimy likes of Walters and Bloom were able to flourish.

Not in any of those aforementioned cases did I see a university official step forward and mete out the type of punishment and criticism the coaches at the heart of the scandals deserved.

Sure, Kentucky basketball coach Eddie Sutton, whose guilt is not as clear-cut as some of the others, submitted his resignation. So did Texas A&M football coach Jackie Sherrill, who did so after almost getting zapped with a bribery rap by one of his former players.

But football coach/warden Barry Switzer remains very much the man at Oklahoma, where he's been conducting spring practice from the comfort of a golf cart after injuring his knees in a skiing accident.

Given the severity of the crimes many of his players have been charged with, someone from the school should have cut Switzer's legs out from underneath him a long, long time ago.

That no one at the university had the guts or the clout to do it tells you all you need to understand. College sports remains ruled by a win-at-all-costs mentality. No college president

this side of the Ivy League will ever stand up and take on a winning, popular coach whose team is bringing in millions of dollars.

Again, none of this is a bulletin, but that doesn't mean we have to like it. It also doesn't mean that we can't enjoy watching Walters and Bloom get what's coming to them.

Putting them behind bars probably won't do much in the long run to clean up the mess that college sports has become. But it can't hurt.

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