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Walters, Bloom sentenced to jail, fined \$395,000

By GLENORA CROUCHER

CHICAGO -- Sports agents **Norby Walters** and **Lloyd Bloom**, convicted of coercing college athletes into signing illegal representation contracts, were sentenced Monday to prison and fined \$395,000.

Walters, 57, was sentenced to five years in jail, five years' probation and fined \$250,000. **Bloom**, 29, was sentenced to three years in prison, five years' probation and fined \$145,000, minus whatever he pays back to Kansas City Chiefs running back Paul Palmer as restitution for a business deal.

A prosecution request to have them imprisoned immediately was denied and **Walters** and **Bloom** were given 30 days to surrender to authorities and begin serving their sentences.

The sports agents were convicted April 13 of seven counts of racketeering, conspiracy and mail fraud.

'This is a high stakes gamble,' U.S. District Judge George Marovich said. 'And now it's time to pay off.'

Walters tearfully pleaded for compassion, asking Marovich to weigh his entire life before imposing sentence. He pointed to some 50 letters praising his character.

'I am responsible for creating parity for black entertainers in the entertainment world,' Walters said. 'I wouldn't dream of breaking the law. That's not who I am.'

Bloom apologized and told the court he would just like to get on with his life.

'I might not be the brightest person, but I work hard,' he said. 'If I could get a second chance, I would like it. I promise this court I will get my life straightened out.'

It took jurors six days in April to wade through mountains of evidence presented in the four-week trial. Witnesses included New York mob chieftain Michael Franzese, singer Dionne Warwick, University of Michigan football coach Bo Schembechler and Chicago Bears safety Maurice Douglass.

The case came to the attention of the government when **Walters** filed suit against several players who broke their contracts and signed with other agents shortly before the NFL draft.

Marovich said one of the most disturbing aspects of the case concerned the agents' connection with organized crime as evidenced by the testimony of Franzese.

'Michael Franzese's presence weighs heavily on the scales of justice,' the judge said.

Franzese testified for the prosecution, saying for years he used veiled threats of violence to help **Walters** keep his entertainers under contract. He also testified he provided Walters and Bloom with \$50,000 to open their business, World Sports and Entertainment. **Walters** repeatedly called Franzese a 'liar.'

The prosecution, led by U.S. Attorney Anton Valukas, accused the agents of using money and cars to coax college athletes into breaking NCAA rules by signing representation contracts before their eligibility expired.

Prosecutors contended **Walters** and **Bloom defrauded** seven Midwestern universities of thousands of dollars: Ohio State, Notre Dame, Illinois, Michigan, Michigan State, Purdue and Iowa.

Defense attorneys said their clients broke NCAA rules, not the law. The defense presented promisory notes signed by the athletes, showing the cash installments they received were actually loans from **Walters** and Bloom, not gifts.

Marovich called the sentences a warning to all rule breakers in college athletics.

'You may be playing in a different ballgame and it might be called hard ball,' he said.



