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2 Sports Agents get prison terms - Coaches, boosters also get warning from judge

By Adrienne Drell June 20, 1989 Publication: Chicago Sun-Times Page: 1 Word Count: 586

A federal judge sentenced two sports agents to prison Monday for signing amateur college athletes to improper professional contracts and warned college coaches, administrators and even alumni boosters they could be next. "I do want to give fair warning to those who may violate those rules, whatever they may be. You may be playing in a different ballgame, and it might be called hardball," said U.S. District Judge George M. Marovich in sentencing **Norby Walters** to five years in prison and **Lloyd Bloom** to three.

Walters and **Bloom** are the first sports agents in the United States to be sent to prison for inducing undergraduate players to sign representation agreements while ineligible to do so under the National Collegiate Athletic Association rules. The two contend the practice is commonplace.

If **Walters**, 57, and **Bloom**, 30, are guilty of mail **fraud**, **racketeering**

and conspiracy, Marovich suggested, "so too may be alumni and other boosters who pass money or cars under the table and conspire with the athlete to lie about it. So too may be the coach or administrator who acts in like fashion."

Walters, a former nightclub owner and entertainment agent, said he rued the day he went into the sports agent business.

When several college athletes dumped Walters for other agents, he filed lawsuits to get back the advances he had paid them, and that "opened up a Pandora's box," Walters said.

"I've never broken any laws," a tearful Walters told Marovich. "Please don't send me to prison."

Marovich resisted government pleas to imprison the two men immediately and gave them 30 days to report to the designated penal institutions. A July 12 hearing is scheduled, however, on whether bond will be permitted pending an appeal.

Walters, a New York resident, was ordered to forfeit \$250,000 from his athletic business to the government and Bloom \$145,000 he got from Kansas City Chiefs star Paul Palmer. More than \$56,000 already has been repaid.

"There are four quarters to a game, and I'm just down at halftime," said Bloom, now a Los Angeles resident, expressing confidence over the appeal.

Watching the proceedings were three of the jurors who on April 13 convicted Walters and Bloom of defrauding four universities of scholarship money paid to the athletes. Bloom also was found guilty of threatening athletes with violence when they tried to renege on their contracts.

Jury forewoman Marjorie Benson called the sentences "fair and about what I expected."

A star government witness was mobster Michael Franzese, who testified he financed Walters' sports agency with \$50,000 and allowed his name to be invoked to frighten recalcitrant clients.

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

The judge expressed concern that 43 athletes who received special deals to repay their schools and perform community service rather than face prosecution had not even begun their assignments.

"It is hoped that the United States attorney's office will take its obligation to enforce the law

seriously," said Marovich.

"A startling aspect of this trial was the absence of any easily identifiable good guys. The universities are not simon-pure, and I do not see the athletes in a favorable light," Marovich said. "In a trial that considered charges leveled against the entire system of big-time college athletics as well as Walters and Bloom, there were no heroes."

Norby Walters, sentenced to five years in prison Monday, says he rues the day he became a sports agent.; Lloyd Bloom watches as his attorneys comment after he was sentenced Monday to three years in prison and told to repay some fees. Credit: Amanda Alcock

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