

NEWS

JUDGE SENTENCES SPORTS AGENTS: 'IT'S TIME TO PAY UP'

By John Gorman
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A federal judge Monday sentenced sports agents **Norby Walters** and **Lloyd Bloom** to prison, declaring they had engaged in "a high stakes game and it's time to pay up."

Walters, 57, was given a five-year sentence and Bloom, 30, a three-year term for compromising the eligibility of college football players by signing them to early contracts and then threatening those who tried to break the contracts or refused to repay loans.

U.S. District Court Judge George Marovich rejected Walters' tearful plea and **Bloom's** terse apology to the court and his family. Marovich also blasted the athletes who took the bribes and the schools who profited from the athletes' performances.

"Those athletes who received money for prematurely signing with **Walters** and **Bloom** are equally guilty of fraud," Marovich said. "The court was deeply disturbed by the athletes' testimony that they have not yet begun to perform the community service and restitution acts they agreed to in exchange for bypassing a trial."

Marovich then warned the universities that the public may perceive that the millions of dollars made in college sports "have corrupted everything the money touches." He added he doubted the trial would alter the policies of colleges with major sports programs.

"I am not so naive to minimize the impact of money on the decision-making process," he said. "The idealistic goal of education may be perpetually overshadowed by the concrete reality of a money-making enterprise."

U.S. Atty. Anton Valukas, who prosecuted the case with Howard Pearl and Helene Greenwald, had asked Marovich for an unspecified period of prison time for Walters for "using his ties to organized crime to further his business interests."

"Mr. Walters made use of a system where he believed you can cheat on your taxes, you can tell a little lie, give a good con job, you can bribe purchasing agents to get business and walk away with a good buck," Valukas said.

As he addressed Marovich in a packed courtroom, **Walters** whispered that his entire life be weighed before Marovich imposed sentence.

"Does a man who spent his life doing the right thing do the wrong thing?" **Walters** said. "No." Scores of letters praising **Walters** for his charitable work had been mailed to Marovich, the judge acknowledged.

Walters exhaled dramatically before attacking the credibility of the chief witness against him.

"Michael Franzese is a liar," **Walters** said.

A captain in the Colombo organized crime family in New York, **Franzese** had testified that he had known **Walters** since the mid-1950s and had been his business partner since 1970 when his father, Sonny, was sent to prison. Franzese testified he had given **Walters** \$50,000 in 1985 to start the sports agent business, World Sports & Entertainment Inc.

"While I applaud Mr. Walters for his good acts, I also feel that he should be held accountable for his bad acts as well," Marovich said, but added, "as the trial examined the field of college athletics, various bad actors surfaced. Mr. Walters and Mr. **Bloom** were certainly among them, if not leading the pack."

Bloom and **Walters** were convicted in April of racketeering, mail fraud and racketeering conspiracy.

Assistant U.S. Atty. Howard Pearl told the judge **Bloom** had engaged in acts "traditionally associated with loan sharks and con men."

"When the athletes threatened to repudiate their agreements, Mr. Bloom threatened them with grave bodily harm," Pearl reminded the judge. "He threatened to break the legs of (Bears defensive back) Maurice Douglass and

(Dallas Cowboys wide receiver) Everett Gay. They were terrified by those threats."

One of Bloom's attorneys, Dan Webb, said Bloom was sorry for what he had done and had admitted his guilt to prosecutors before the trial.

"He's a good man who's made some mistakes," Webb said. "He embarked on the sports agent business without the foggiest idea of what the sports business was all about."

After Marovich sentenced the two, he ruled that the two would be given a month to settle their affairs before surrendering to a federal prison.

Marovich listened to testimony by FBI special agent Scott Jennings that Bloom had told him in January, 1988, that Walters had threatened to have him killed when he dissolved their partnership and moved to Los Angeles. Marovich ruled that neither man was a threat and allowed them to remain free on bond until their surrender.

At five years, Walters can be expected to serve about 40 months, authorities said. Bloom can be expected to serve about two years.

From the moment Walter and Bloom began to seek college athletes, they caused ripples. They eventually signed 58 athletes from 32 schools, as many as 50 whose eligibility had not expired. Most of the athletes who testified against the agents signed agreements with the government to reimburse their schools and to perform some community service.
