#### SPORTS ON TRIAL



In grand jury testimony, some former Florida players alleged that head basketball coach Norm Sloan paid them.

## 4 Agents Plead Guilty To Conspiracy Charges, Save Gators From Trial

By Marlon Manuel

Four sports agents charged with defrauding the University of Florida have pleaded guilty in Tallahassee, Fla., to charges arising from secret payments to former football and basketball players at the school.

The trial, which was expected to focus on recruiting practices and coaches' dealings with athletes at Florida, is canceled by the plea.

University officials were concerned about a high-profile trial because of grand jury testimony. portions of which were obtained earlier this month by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, alleged that head basketball coach Norm Sloan and assistant Monte Towe paid players thousands of

Agents Gerald Gratenstein. Greg Latimer, John Kasbar and Glenn Haft pleaded guilty Thursday to reduced charges of conspiracy to commit mail and wire

As part of the plea agreement, racketeering charges against the organization run by the four, Professional Athlete's Financial Advisors (PAFA), were dropped.

The agents, based in Hollywood, Fla., also agreed never to represent athletes again. They now face up to five years in prison and \$250,000 in fines. Sentencing is scheduled Dec. 11 in Gainesville, Fla.

Larry Byrd, Towe's attorney, said the guilty plea indicates the lack of validity in the allegations detailed in a defense motion filed Sept. 12, which contained portions of the grand jury

testimony. "If they could prove what they were alleging, they would have had a defense," Byrd said. "I don't know why they went to the extremes they went to release that information and then three weeks later retract the moin effect, the allegations.

"I don't feel they would have given up that defense if they thought it had any validity."

The NCAA, which could still level stiff sanctions against Florida — including the suspension of the football and basketball teams if they are found guilty of violations - had no comment on the agreement. The NCAA was expected to follow the trial closely, looking for possible violations of its rules.

Assistant U.S. attorney Lyndia Barrett said her office will share any information it can, as allowable by law, with the NCAA and the university.

Neither defense attorneys nor prosecutors would discuss how the plea agreement was reached. Sloan was unavailable for comment.

In the grand jury testimony, former Gator players, including All-American Vernon Maxwell, alleged that Sloan and Towe paid him and others while they were in college. Maxwell testified that Towe paid him \$800 in high school and another \$1,000 when he signed to play for Florida. He also said Sloan paid him throughout his career at Florida.

Maxwell, according to the defense motion, estimated that he received approximately \$1,000 a month from the coaches during a six-month period in his sopho-

more and junior years. Whenever he needed money, he "primarily went to Coach Towe and Coach Sloan ... and used some of this money for cocaine," the motion said.

"I don't think we're experiencing a sigh of relief," Byrd said. "You're never relieved when there are severe allegations, though they have in effect been retracted. The coaches at the University of Florida, I think, are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. It's nothing to rejoice about, but Monte's glad some of the truth is coming out."

The University of Florida said it was prepared for a trial.

The guilty plea "is probably a very positive thing. Now the university and the government are spared this very expensive and time-consuming situation," Florida vice president Linda Gray said.

Said Florida athletics director Bill Arnsparger: "We were ready to cooperate with the judicial process." Arnsparger and assistant basketball coach Kenny McCranney had been subpoenaed to testify at the trial.

As part of the plea agreement, the agents admitted to the factual allegations of the indictment, which included paying thousands of dollars to Florida athletes. The indictment charged they signed Maxwell and former Gator football players Tommy Duhart, Frankie Neal, Ron Moten, Clifford Charlton and Alonzo Mitz before their eligibility had expired.

"We are aware of the plea," NCAA director of enforcement David Berst said. "We don't have any reaction. We are going to continue our contact with the university."

Florida officials have kept the NCAA aware of developments since the U.S. attorney's office began its investigation a year ago. The grand jury, impaneled in June 1988, has been discharged, signaling the end of the government's probe.

The defense was trying to prove the athletes already were ineligible because of the alleged payments by coaches.

"I have no comment. Absolutely no comment," said Hugh Culverhouse Jr., the attorney for Kasbar and Haft.

Donald Bierman, the attorney for Gratenstein and Latimer, was unavailable for comment.

A federal source familiar with the case said the government would have been unable to prosecute the agents if the grand jury testimony in the motion was

"How can the prosecutor sit there if he knows the coach has paid players?" the source said.

Barrett, said the trial would have been just the second federal case involving sports agents. In April, a federal jury in Chicago convicted sports agents Norb Valters and Lloyd Bloom on similar charges. That case is on appeal.

"We obviously had seen that indictment and were aware of it," Barrett said. "We talked to the people in Chicago and they were very helpful. But our case was very different in the facts."

The Walters-Bloom case also involved charges of extortion. which were absent from the Florida case.

#### PRO FOOTBALL: THE NFL

# Miller Aims for Oct. 8 Return vs. Rams

By Len Pasquarelli Staff Writer

Atlanta Falcons quarterback Chris Miller said Friday he could be ready to play in the club's Oct. 8 game against the Los Angeles Rams.

"That's what I'm shooting for. I plan on stepping things up next week and doing whatever I can to get ready for the Rams game," Miller said following the Falcons' afternoon practice. "I'm not doing anybody any good sitting around. I want to play as soon as possible."

Miller threw a football Friday for the first time since sustaining a rib injury of still-undetermined severity in last Sunday's 13-9 loss at Indianapolis.

While his replacement, Hugh Millen, led the offensive unit through its final preparations for Sunday's game against the Green Bay Packers in Milwaukee, Miller stood on the sidelines tossing 12- to 15-yard passes to Falcons assistant trainer Billy Brooks for about 15 minutes.



Miller exhibited good range of motion in his right shoulder and threw some of the passes with authority. After every few passes, Miller would "windmill" his right arm.

"I think I had some pretty decent zip on a few passes. The big thing is that the range of motion has come back extremely fast; that's an important factor," said Miller. "The pain isn't as bad as it was Sunday and Monday, but I wouldn't want to have to take a hit right now."

The third-year veteran suffered the rib injury in the third quarter last Sunday when he was sacked by Colts defensive end Ezra Johnson.

X-rays Sunday and again Tuesday were negative, although team physicians still suspect that Miller may have cracked ribs.

While it normally takes about

four weeks to recover from such injuries, Falcons officials have been guardedly optimistic this week that Miller could be back in action much sooner. They refused to rule the quarterback out for any game beyond Sunday's.

Miller is scheduled to have bone scan next Monday. He said that even if the scan revealed crack, it might not prevent him from

"I don't know that there's much

difference between a crack and bad bruise," said Miller. "I think it comes down to how much I can handle the pain. I'll have to talk to [the team's medical staffl about that." Miller's recovery has been aid-

ed, he said, by underwater-resistance therapy, a treatment he receives both at the Falcons complex and at home.

Miller, 24, missed three starts last season and portions of three other games with ankle and elbow injuries. This season, the Falcons 1987 first-round draft choice has completed 54 of 87 passes (62.1 per-

cent) for 654 yards, two touchdowns. no interceptions and a quarterback rating of 92.8.

The Falcons worked out veteran free agent quarterbacks Randy Wright (Green Bay), Mike Norseth (Cincinnati and Cleveland) and Ken Karcher (Denver) on Friday. Coach Marion Campbell said the auditions had nothing to do with Miller's injury and that the club was simply updating its emergency/ready list.

"I'm not going to add another quarterback. I never had intended to," said Campbell.

NOTES: Deion Sanders worked once again with the kickoff return team, in tandem with Kelth Jones, and will likely be used in that capacity Sunday. ... Linebacker Joel Williams was in pads and jogged lightly Friday but is still questionable for Sunday's game. ... Packers offensive line coach Charlie Davis said Friday that he expects No. pick Tony Mandarich to play 20 to 25 snaps against the Falcons.

### Montana, 49ers Pick Up Where Walsh Left Off — As Winners

By Glenn Sheeley

SAN FRANCISCO — The only apparent difference between the San Francisco 49ers in January, when they turned Super Bowl XXIII into a textbook two-minute drill to beat Cincinnati, and now, three games into the 1989 season, is that Joe Montana hasn't hyperventilated

The 49ers, who battle for the NFC West lead Sunday in Candlestick Park with another 3-0 team, the Los Angeles Rams, are still rallying from behind for wins. Bill Walsh has gone to NBC-TV, leaving the coaching to his silverhaired defensive counterpart, George Seifert, but the 49ers are still the NFL's greatest road warriors (3-0 this year, 33-9-1 since 1984).

And Montana is still making his head coach look like, well, a genius. He has kept his opponents breathless instead of running out of breath, as he did against the Bengals.

The 49ers have needed weekly fourth-quarter comebacks to stay unbeaten and, as always, Montana has been the catalyst.

"We've had to fight, scratch and kick our way to 3-0," said Montana, who was sacked eight times last week at Philadelphia. "I think our team is just one that never gives up until the end. It's not just me. We fight to the very last. When players are doing that all around you, it makes your job easier."

For all of Walsh's offensive wizardry, many observers feel he became a distraction for Montana last year, dangling backup Steve Young as a threat to his job. Critics maintain that while Walsh knows plenty about tactics,

he sometimes was insensitive to players' feelings. Two Super Bow. ings and a \$1.2 million salary (that jumps to more than \$2 million next season) notwithstanding, Montana found he was playing tentatively, wondering whether a string of incompletions would get him

"I think I'm somewhat more relaxed," Montana said this week. "It's something that doesn't lay on my mind at this point, anyway."

Instead of changing quarterbacks, Seifert this week has changed Montana's protectors, realigning the 49er offensive line. Right guard Bruce Collie, who twice

stepped on Montana's foot at Philadelphia, has been benched. ■ Steve Wallace from Chamblee, who broke

his ankle in the Super Bowl, starts at right Harris Barton, the former Dunwoody High School player, moves from right tackle to

right guard. Former Georgia player Guy McIntyre goes to left guard for Jeff Bregel, who was suspended Friday by Seifert for missing three

days of practice without an excuse.

Not only is the San Francisco running game in need of a spark — Roger Craig has just 50 yards rushing in the past two weeks but Seifert realized the danger of continuing to subject Montana to such pounding. With the Rams coming to town, it's a good time to stop the pressure. They sacked Montana and Young nine times in a 38-16 upset on the last weekend of the 1988 regular season. With 15 sacks yielded by San Francisco this season, that's

one for every 6.6 pass attempts.

But the quarterback is less concerned than

"It's OK unless you take a bunch of hard' hits," said Montana. "Most times you're just getting hit and wrestled to the ground."

The 49ers' ability to come back from lategame deficits is evidence they might be motivated enough to become the first Super Bowl champion to repeat since the Pittsburgh Steelers in 1978-79. The previous champions before San Francisco — the New York Giants and Washington — failed to make the playoffs the next season.

Montana, 33, says that while a few 49ers might have written books during the off-season, they remained in tune with their playbooks, especially with a new head coach.

"I disagree with that whole outlook," Montana said. "I don't think the off-the-field things have that much to do with it. People say we can't win. Hey, we want to go back [to the Super Bowl]. We know that feeling."

What's amazing about Montana is that two years ago his career was in jeopardy because of back surgery. Last season, his swollen right elbow was more bothersome. Another factor should keep Montana's statistics healthy wide receiver Jerry Rice, who had six catches for 164 yards last week, running his touchdown total to 57 in 62 games.

But Montana makes it work, perhaps better than anyone in the NFL. Former Washington quarterback Sonny Jurgensen said after the Philadelphia game, "If I had one game to play, Joe Montana would be my guy." Earlier this week, Rams coach John Robinson suggested that Montana might be the finest NFL quarter-

"I don't want to tick off the Roger Staubach fans, the Johnny Unitas fans or any Dieter Brock fans out there," Robinson said, "but, you know, Joe's pretty damn good."

