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Defendant Admits Role In College Sports Scam

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Two years after his racketeering conviction was reversed, former sports agent Lloyd Bloom entered a conditional guilty plea Thursday to reduced charges and was ordered to serve 500 hours of community service. A weeping Bloom said he was "stupid and wrong" for signing college football players to secret professional contracts - but indicated he was still not sure whether he had committed a federal crime.

U.S. District Judge George M. Marovich also placed Bloom on five years' probation, ordered him to pay up to \$4,336 in restitution to Purdue University and told him to finish paying former Temple University star Paul Palmer \$145,000 for an alleged fraud scheme.

Bloom originally had been sentenced to three years in prison and ordered to pay \$145,000 in restitution on charges of racketeering, racketeering conspiracy, conspiracy and two counts of mail fraud.

The New York-based sports agents used cash and gifts to lure athletes into signing professional contracts that made them ineligible to play college ball or receive scholarship money.

Under the terms of his guilty plea, all but one mail fraud count involving Purdue was dismissed. Bloom pleaded guilty to that single count with the understanding he can withdraw his plea if a federal appeals court finds that the actions of Bloom's co-defendant, Norby

Walters, did not constitute mail fraud. Both Walters and Bloom said they may have violated NCAA rules - but not federal law.

In September, 1990, the 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals threw out the pair's 1989 convictions, based on a jury instruction error and a failure to sever the cases. But the appeals panel never addressed a key legal question.

As Marovich said Thursday, "What they did wasn't very much in dispute. The question is, what do you call it and is it a crime at all?"

But, Marovich said in imposing sentence, "I don't want Mr. Bloom to think what he did was OK."

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Helene Greenwald and Robert Rivkin contended the two violated the mail fraud statutes by sending false student claims of eligibility through the mail.

Bloom's attorneys, Dan Webb and Steven Molo, sought probation for Bloom, saying the universities had not demanded scholarship money from 43 athletes who agreed to pay it rather than be prosecuted.

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