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Mob figure says players owed money to crime family

ESPN.com news services

NEW YORK -- Admitted mobster Michael **Franzese** said this week on HBO's "Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel" that players who owed money to the Colombo crime family -- on a team he wouldn't identify -- fixed games in the 1970s.

HBO reported the team in question was the Yankees, and **Franzese** said the Yankees back then "had some gambling issues."

Franzese did not directly identify the Yankees as the team he was describing, nor did he mention specific players by name.

"You got to work this out, get the money, borrow the money, do whatever you have to do," **Franzese** said he told the players. "And if all else fails, I got another way for you to make it up: You're going to help us win a game."

Franzese said he told players to miss catches and deliberately not hit.

The Yankees went so far as to issue a statement denying HBO's accusations, and directed their rebuttal at **Franzese**.

"The charges made by **Franzese** are absolutely beyond belief," Yankees spokesman Howard Rubenstein said Tuesday. "He's a discredited former hoodlum, and it's an outrage that any credence would be given to him with his bad reputation as he seeks personal publicity. The Yankees know nothing about any of these claims."

Mets hitting coach Chris Chambliss, who played with the Yankees from 1974-79, was surprised by the allegations surrounding a team that won the AL pennant from 1976-78.

"As far as I know, we came to win every day," Chambliss said. "We showed it by playing in three straight World Series. I can't imagine us fixing games."

Rob Michaels, who said he represents **Franzese**, also told ESPN.com that **Franzese** never said the team was the Yankees. Michaels, of Lord and Michaels Entertainment, said that **Franzese** is a lifelong Yankees fan.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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