

Hawkeye Past and Hawkeye Future

Many of us are used to watching the life and times of the Mafia on The Soprano's show on HBO. Iowa seems far removed from the crime and corruption exhibited by this New Je...

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More than 16 years after Ronnie Harmon's final football game for Iowa, people are still saying he threw the 1986 Rose Bowl.

Harmon, a standout running back and pass receiver who lettered as a Hawkeye from 1982-85, is featured on the Real Sports show on HBO.

Michael Franzese, a thug who was associated with sports agent Norby Walters, said on the show that evidence points to the belief that Harmon threw the Rose Bowl game against UCLA.

That is not a new thought. It's been debated for years.

Harmon, who had lost only one fumble during Iowa's 10-1 regular season, coughed up the ball four times in the first half against the Bruins, who won the game, 45-28.

Tape of the game is shown as Franzese is interviewed by correspondent Bernard Goldberg.

Goldberg: "I can't honestly say because I was away in prison at the time," Franzese said. "It doesn't look good, that's for sure."

"And I would certainly have my suspicions."

"Which are?" Goldberg asks.

"He threw the game," Franzese answers.

Goldberg then says Harmon, "who admits he took \$50,000 from Walters and Franzese, denies he threw the Rose Bowl game."

When I was at the Chicago Bears' preseason training camp four years ago, I interviewed Harmon and asked him about the controversial Rose Bowl game.

He told me he didn't fumble intentionally.

Hayden Fry, Iowa's retired coach, supports Harmon.

In his book, "Hayden Fry: A High-Porch Picnic", Fry wrote this of the Rose Bowl game:

"Harmon took a lot of heat because he lost four fumbles, all in the first half. That was uncharacteristic of him; I think he fumbled once during the regular season.

"The game film reveals that every fumble he lost was caused by a UCLA defender making a hard hit. They just knocked the ball loose.

"They did a great job of tackling. UCLA made bad things happen to Iowa; Iowa didn't self-destruct. Ronnie Harmon had a tremendous football career with the Hawkeyes, and I hated to see it end that way. He enjoyed a long, successful career in the NFL, and I always enjoy seeing him when he comes by to visit."

Dan McCarney, then Iowa's defensive line coach and now Iowa State's head coach, said Harmon's four fumbles in the Rose Bowl game still puzzle him.

"It was so uncharacteristic of him," McCarney said. "It was a shock to all of us on the sideline. Harmon had great ball security, tremendous speed and his hands were as great as anyone I've seen in a collegiate running back.

"To this day, I can't figure it out." On the HBO show, Franzese said Walters "recruited top (NFL) draft choices to be part of his agency. If, in fact, he did that, we would be able to influence the outcome of some games. That's what we had planned."

Goldberg said Walters and Franzese "paid to get that talent. From 1985 to 1987, even when Franzese was doing time for a racketeering conviction, the pair built a virtual all-star team of players paid under the table and signed to illegal post-dated contracts—players like Ronnie Harmon, the star running back at Iowa."

As Goldberg speaks of Harmon, tape is shown of the former Hawkeye playing.

Goldberg said Harmon and his father secretly taped a conversation they had with Walters, in which the agent spelled out the financial arrangement he was planning with Harmon.

Goldberg said "Harmon signed and the checks began rolling in—part of the \$800,000 Harmon and 57 other college stars were to get them to sign with Walters and Franzese.

"Then strange things began happening in college football—like the 1986 Rose Bowl."

Tape of Harmon's fumbles and a dropped pass from quarterback Chuck Long that would have given Iowa a touchdown against UCLA followed.

On the show, Franzese is called "a big mobster—one of the most powerful in the country. Sports was his passion, and he got some of the biggest athletes on his side."

Franzese said major league baseball players, on a team he wouldn't identify, fixed games in the 1970s. HBO said the team was the New York Yankees.

The Yankees issued a statement denying HBO's accusations.