



News

Harmon still chased by fix rumor 16 years later

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By Dylan Butler

The game was played 16 years ago, but former Bayside High School standout Ronnie Harmon still is haunted by accusations that he threw the 1986 Rose Bowl when at the University of Iowa.

After dying down for several years, the rumor was reignited by a recent edition of HBO's series, "Real Sports."

On the show, which aired last Tuesday, Michael Franzese, a former capo in the Colombo crime family, hints that Harmon, then a high-profile senior running back at Iowa, may have fixed the game.

Harmon, who had fumbled just once all season, coughed up the ball four times in the first half alone and also dropped what appeared to be a sure touchdown catch in the 48-25 loss to underdog UCLA.

"I know it doesn't look good, that's for sure," Franzese said of Harmon's performance. "I would certainly have been suspicious. . .that he threw the game."

Harmon, who could not be reached for comment, has in the past denied a part in any fix, but he did admit to taking money under the table from Norby Walters who, along with Lloyd Bloom, paid 58 top college football players a total of \$800,000 while they were still in school.

Walters, who to that point only represented black entertainers, was a Colombo family associate, Franzese said.

In 1989, Franzese testified for the government against Walters and Bloom.

Walters met with Harmon and his father during Harmon's senior year, and in a secretly taped conversation that was aired on the show, explained how the deal would go down.

"I want to make a deal today. I'm willing to come up with a few thousand dollars, cash American for Ronnie," he said. "In addition to that, on the first of every month, there will be \$250 sitting there waiting for him."

When Harmon's father asked why they couldn't wait until after the football season, in order to keep Ronnie Harmon out of trouble, Walters responded, "Why do we have to wait until January? I say, here's a few thousand dollars. And come Jan. 2, we then send in the paper to the NFL and that's it."

After a stellar college career, Harmon was drafted 16th overall by the Buffalo Bills in the 1987 NFL Draft. He was one of seven first-round picks signed by Walters and Bloom of World Sports and Entertainers, Inc.

Harmon's NFL career spanned 11 years. After playing for the Bills, Harmon played for the San Diego Chargers, Houston Oilers, Chicago Bears and Tennessee Titans before retiring after the 1997 season.

Harmon is fourth all-time among running backs with 582 career receptions. He led all running backs and was sixth overall in the league with a career-best 79 catches in 1992 and Harmon went 52 straight games from 1992-1995 without fumbling once.

Harmon, whose brothers, Derrick and Kevin, played in the NFL, most recently served as the offensive coordinator under Tom Pugh at Holy Cross High School last year.

"I don't know anything about a fix, I never heard anything about it but I just know he's a great coach, he's great with kids and he does a tremendous job in the community," Pugh said of Harmon, who will be back this year. "He's a tremendous motivator and a great teacher."

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