

'Clean' sports agent defends the profession



Photo courtesy of Leigh Steinberg
Steinberg

By Bob Asmussen
Senior Editor

Sports agents have gotten a bad rap recently, and maybe it's well deserved. They've been likened to things like weasels, vermon, snakes and other slithering creatures.

But are sports agents really unscrupulous? Leigh Steinberg has an answer to that.

"The sports agent field is overcrowded right now and that's because of the NFL-USFL wars," Steinberg said. "There are a lot of agents scrambling to try to find clients, and yes, some of them do unethical things to get clients. It's their business. They have to try and survive."

Steinberg is a sports agent who has, among other things, negotiated a \$40 million contract for Tampa Bay's Steve Young with the USFL's Los Angeles Express. Steinberg also is involved with trying to clean up the sports agents' field.

Other clients Steinberg has includes Steve Bartkowski, Warren Moon, Tony Eason, Eric Hipple, Neil Lomax, Ken O'Brien, Kenny Easley and Mark Gastineau.

Steinberg said he earns between 3 percent and 5 percent of the players' contract as the money is distributed. For instance, if a player receives a \$1 million signing bonus and \$1 million per year, Steinberg would receive 3 percent or 5 percent of the bonus (about \$30,000 to \$50,000) plus 3 percent to 5 percent each year of the contract.

Steinberg said the most significant problem faced by collegiate sports today is illegal payments from agents to players and the illegal recruitment of players. Steinberg said he thinks 40 percent of senior football and basketball players in Division I will have signed with agents before their eligibility expires.

"The best players are approached and offered money, cars and clothes in

exchange for signing a representation contract with the agent," he said. "Agents are swarming the campuses."

Steinberg said he has never signed or approached a player before that player's eligibility ran out. He said most of his clients either approach him directly or are referred to him by other athletes or coaches.

Steinberg said he began his sports representation career while a law student at California. He said Atlanta quarterback and former California quarterback Steve Bartkowski approached him about representing him in his talks with the Atlanta team. Bartkowski and Steinberg knew each other as students and Steinberg agreed to negotiate the contract. Atlanta forked over what was at that time the largest contract in NFL history to sign Bartkowski; Steinberg had found a career.

"It was startling at 26 years of age to negotiate the biggest contract in history," he said.

Steinberg said one way to eliminate part of the problems the NCAA is having with sports agents is to raise the amount of money given to the athletes for scholarships. He said part of the enticement for the players to sign with agents early is that it gives the player spending money he otherwise wouldn't have.

"I would raise the scholarships so the players could have some extra spending money," he said. "Increasing the scholarship would be very helpful because it would eliminate the rationale for the player to take the money. If he had the spending money from the scholarship, he wouldn't need the money from the agent."

Steinberg said 1986 will be a good year for the NFL draft and therefore a good year for sports agents. He said he doesn't pay much attention to college players until after the season.

Steinberg said the Big Eight has several players that are likely to be high draft picks. He said Oklahoma's Tony

Casillas is an excellent pro prospect, as is Oklahoma State's Leslie O'Neill. Steinberg said another Sooner that could be a high draft pick is Kevin Murphy, who likely will play linebacker in the pro's.

Of the Nebraska players, Steinberg said several have a chance to be drafted. He said the potential draftees include tight end Todd Frain, I-back Paul Miles and fullback Tom Rathman. Overall, Steinberg said the next draft shapes up as an excellent one, particularly at running back and quarterback.

"Last year was a miserable skill position draft," he said. "This year, it's just the opposite."

As an agent, Steinberg said he has certain criteria all his clients must meet. One of his main criteria to represent an athlete is that the player give back part of his salary to his community or school. Some of Steinberg's clients have set up scholarships at their colleges while others have helped out in the community. Steinberg said it is important that his clients are good role models.

"I'm just sick of athletes that skim cream off the top of the community and don't give anything back," he said. "Some pro athletes have become grown up, spoiled playboys."

"All I insist upon is that they have to have good values," he said. "Athletes are surrounded by glitter and glamour, but all that is going to fade. Values don't fade. I want the player to be welcome back in his community not because he was a good athlete but because he was a good person."

Besides helping athletes negotiate contracts, Steinberg said he also works on setting up investments and businesses for the athletes. He said his job goes beyond getting the contract done.

"My job is to get the athlete in the best financial shape for when his career is over," he said. "The contact between player and athlete should be close and constant."

Women's team play scrimmage

Maurtice Ivy scored 23 points and dealt seven assists to lead the White squad to an 81-76 win over the Red team in the Nebraska women's basketball team's annual intrasquad scrimmage at Kearney Sunday.

The game was a homecoming for Cornhusker Stacy Imming, who finished with 18 points. Angie Miller added 21 points and sophomore Lisa LaGuardia had 22.

Nebraska coach Kelly Hill said she

was pleased with her team's transition play and defensive pressure. However, there was one statistic she wasn't happy about.

"My main concern was turnovers," Hill said. "We tried to make too much happen."

The Huskers open their season Saturday against Washburn University.

Tip off is 5:15 p.m. at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

Ivy hopes to propel women's team to Big Eight title, NCAA tourney

By Brian Keenan
Staff Reporter

Maurtice Ivy has always been a woman under pressure.

Since her freshman year at Omaha Central, when she almost led her team to state, she has been a marked woman.

"I think that I'm a pressure player," Ivy said. "I think I do better when there's more pressure."

After gaining honorable mention all-State her freshman year in high school, Ivy went on to become an all-State performer for three years. She also won numerous other honors including being named to several high school All-American teams and women's high school Athlete of the Year in Nebraska for 1984. Because of this, she was one of the most sought after recruits for women's basketball.

"I went to Nebraska because I'm very close to my family, and I wanted to stay close to home," Ivy said. "I also hoped that some of the people that

watched me in high school would come to see us (the team) play in college."

Bringing high hopes with her, Ivy did not turn the team around instantly as hoped. She was second on the team in scoring with 14.0 points per game. She was the team leader in blocked shots with 27. This year brings new hopes.

"She's been playing very well so far in the preseason," said Kelly Hill, Nebraska women's basketball coach. "She's been playing very consistently."

This summer, Ivy played in the National Sports Festival. Ivy said the Sports Festival helped her because there was a much higher level of competition, which helped her compare herself with some of the better players.

For the upcoming season, Ivy sees her role as more of a leader. She said that she hopes that she is up to the task. Coach Hill agreed.

"Maurtice is one of the leaders of this team," Coach Hill said. "I think she realizes her role."

Coach Hill said that Ivy should con-

tinue to improve and people should remember that she is only a sophomore. She said that the added year of experience should help her, and she did have a very good year her freshman year.

"I don't feel as much pressure this year because I know more about the Big Eight this year," Ivy said. "I know what to expect from everyone now."

Coach Hill said that the only flaw in Ivy's game last year was patience. She said she has seen a lot of improvement in this area this year.

"Last year, she didn't have enough patience with herself," Coach Hill said. "She thought that she should be perfect every time, and she could not tolerate herself making mistakes."

Ivy said that her goals for the year are for the team to win the Big Eight title and to qualify for the women's NCAA tournament.

"We have the players now to go to the tournament," Ivy said. "I think that this is the year that we will go."

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