

## Stars still flock to autograph fraud

**A**BOUT 20 years ago, the sports autograph/collectibles business took off. It was lousy with bad guys then. Today? You tell me.

Staten Island autograph dealer Mike Bertolini made a modicum of news last week when he was ordered by the New York State Supreme Court to pay Peyton Manning \$105,000 - money, owed for Manning's autograph and autograph, show appearances. End of story.

But not really. This is the same Mike Bertolini who:

- Was a central figure in the Pete Rose gambling scandal, serving in 1989 as Rose's go-between with bookies.

- In 1995 was sentenced to 14 months in prison for tax fraud and for second-degree assault reduced from attempted murder - in a baseball bat attack on a former sports-memorabilia business partner.

- Was the subject of a 1996 letter from NFL attorney Jay Moyer to star

players warning them about their participation in a Bertoliniautograph show extravaganza in New Jersey.

Was described by a U.S. Attorney as "a career criminal," and by his own attorney as having "a gambling habit."

- Was a key player in autograph shows featuring Duke Snider, who in 1995 pleaded guilty to tax evasion in connection with those shows.

- And yet sports biggest names - from John Elway to Muhammad Ali - with the encouragement of their agents, continue to do business with Bertolini.

In 1996, a month following Bertolini's conviction and several weeks before Bertolini was due in prison, Joe Montana told ESPN that Bertolini is "someone you could trust." Montana still makes paid appearances at Bertolini shows.

In the same ESPN piece, Emmitt

Smith said that despite Bertolini's conviction and prison due-date; he'd work a Bertolini show a few days later because, "He's not in jail yet."

While we're on the subject, after Gary Carter's election to the Hall of Fame, Carter made the rounds, here, always making sure to publicly thank a fellow named Mead Chasky.

In fact during a recent appearance on Cablevision's Metro Channel to hawk his autograph on Metro's autograph memorabilia sales show, Carter thanked Chasky.

Chasky, the subject of many shady autograph-sales-related tales and testimonies, turned states evidence in the 1994-95 case that resulted in Darryl Strawberry's felony conviction and \$350,000 fine for autograph show-related tax evasion.

In addition to Carter, Chasky is now the autograph agent for Duke Snider.

*Phil Musbaick*