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Local agents pay price for being honest

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PICTURE THIS.

Fort Myers sports agents Kevin and Darlene Jursinski are standing outside the locker room. The prominent college defensive back, projected to be drafted in the first round, is talking to them. He wants them to represent him.

His father has other ideas. He is standing off to the side, talking to another agent with a briefcase.

"Here's \$20,000," the agent says, "Get him to sign."

The player had no idea who the agent was. He was ready to sign with the Jursinskis. Or at least he thought he was.

A long trail of discussion, interaction and good will took a dramatic detour. The father won. Long live the briefcase!

The Jursinskis say the story is true. They say there are many more just like it. And in the current climate - with law-enforcement agencies and the NFL Players Association swooping in on sports agents and petrified athletes - it is not hard to envision.

"We're good agents," Darlene said. "We don't pay anybody. We work very hard."

They have a dozen clients with their KC Sports Management firm, including five in the NFL. There are no Peyton Mannings or Tim Couches in their stable.

They can give their athletes the personal touch. But the reality hits them in the face every day: They are swimming upstream.

"The agents who are trying to do it right aren't doing as well as they could," Kevin said. "You almost have to apologize to athletes. You have to lead off as your entree and say, 'Hey, we can't break the rules. Is it OK to continue to talk to you?'"

It sounds absolutely comical, but they actually are thankful when they hear four magic words: "No, I need money."

It saves them a considerable amount of wasted time on airplanes and in the check-in lines at rental-car outlets and hotels. It saves them money. It spares them heartache.

They say agents are not eager to offer illegal inducements. Not because they're reluctant to break the law, but because they're reluctant to lose money.

"There are kids taking money from eight, nine, 10 different agents," Darlene said. "So you get into a bidding war with them. A lot of agents are going to lose. There's only one that's going to win."

Nothing is subterranean anymore. It's an open cesspool. You dive in and hold your nose.

They do not feel good about the image of agents. On the public-confidence list, they are down there with used-car salesmen and journalists.

There are no easy answers. But one possible solution might be to make the athlete more accountable. Make it a two-way crime with some legal bite.

"I could be wrong," said Kevin, a civil attorney, "but I'm not aware of any (other) criminal act which can be done by two participating people knowingly and freely and one gets charged with a felony and the other person has no crime at all. Aren't you conspiring to perform a felony by accepting money?"

University of Florida coach Steve Spurrier has threatened to deal with money-taking ex-Gators by banning them from the training complex and removing their names from plaques and media guides. The school also has the option of filing lawsuits.

Like that's going to be a popular option. Can you imagine the recruiting pitch to high-school athletes?

"We've had some problems in the past with agents and we've sued a couple of our players," the coach will say. "As far as we're concerned, they don't exist. Now, would you sign here?"

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