

Ex-partner: Bulger and I were FBI informants

BOSTON (AP) — James "Whitey" Bulger and his former partner faced each other for the first time in nearly two decades Thursday, when Stephen "The Rifleman" Flemmi took the stand at Bulger's racketeering trial and told of their years as secret FBI informants while they ran a feared gang in South Boston.

Prosecutors say they were partners in crime, gangsters who together led a criminal organization that ruled Boston's underworld for more than two decades through fear, intimidation and violence. Bulger, of South Boston, was the reputed boss of the mostly Irish-American Winter Hill Gang.

Flemmi's short appearance — he took the stand

about 15 minutes before the day's court session ended and was expected back Friday — was bookended with tense exchanges with Bulger.

As he was led into the witness box, Flemmi gave Bulger a long, hard stare, and Bulger glanced over at him. Afterward, Flemmi, who's now 79, stood in the box with his hands on his hips and stared confidently at the 83-year-old Bulger. The two exchanged words briefly, though it wasn't clear what they said to each other.

Bulger has already had two profanity-laced outbursts during the trial, one directed at his former protege, Kevin Weeks, and the other at a former FBI agent who admitted taking payoffs from Bulger.

Though Flemmi's first appearance was short, prosecutors worked quickly, asking Flemmi to explain how he and Bulger gave information about the Mafia and other criminal organizations to an FBI agent. Flemmi said the two were top-echelon government informants from about 1975 to 1990, a claim the defense has repeatedly tried to rebut.

On Friday, Flemmi will likely be asked to name Bulger as a killer and the man who he watched strangle two 26-year-old women.

Investigators say Flemmi's testimony will be the ultimate betrayal to Bulger, given their long relationship as criminal partners and friends. The two men met in the

late 1960s and became partners in the 1970s.

While Bulger led the Winter Hill Gang, Flemmi had ties to the New England Mafia. Together, they built a criminal organization that made millions by controlling and extorting bookmakers, drug dealers and loan sharks.

"These guys were equal partners. One was not subservient to the other," said Michael Kendall, a former federal prosecutor who investigated several of Bulger's associates.

"Now, with Flemmi testifying against him, I think it's going to be like when Dracula fights Frankenstein — the two personifications of evil at each other's throats," he said.