

A fixer tells his now-familiar story

By Mike Madden
Globe Staff

In the end, after four hours of testimony, four hours of Jeremiah O'Sullivan quietly asking the questions about bribes and fixes and payoffs and four hours of Anthony P. Culla just as quietly answering them, only one man emerged.

His name is Antonio Pellet.

In testimony yesterday in the race-fixing and racketeering trial in US District Court in Boston, Culla said more than a score of jockeys and trainers in Rhode Island and Pennsylvania had been approached to fix races in 1974 and 1975.

Only Antonio Pellet refused, Culla said. "I asked Bobby DeLara if he had spoken to (jockey) Mr. Pellet and Mr. (Richard) Buono," Culla testified about the alleged fix of the ninth race at Lincoln Downs in Rhode Island on March 20, 1975. "Mr. Pellet said no and Mr. Buono said O.K."

Culla said no more about Antonio Pellet. For the rest of the day, the government's chief witness would talk about his attempts at fixing six races at Lincoln Downs and Pocono Downs in Pennsylvania and how no one refused.

Culla, described as a career fixer from Stoneham, sat on the witness stand, speaking softly but in a deep voice into the microphone directly in front of him. Because there are 12 lawyers defending the nine men on trial, the counsel have taken up all the seats normally occupied by the defendants before the bench.

The defendants sit in the first two rows of the spectator gallery. Howard T. Winter of Somerville and James M. Martano of Quincy, among the alleged ring leaders in the scheme, sit in the front row. Sitting in the second row, as if biding their secondary roles as alleged accomplices, were Robert (Rushy) Owen of New Providence and jockey Norman Mercer of Attleboro.

Culla rarely looked over to the defendants. Even when Winter smiled and shook his head from side to side when Culla testified that Winter had told him to teach a disobedient Pennsylvania trainer a lesson by beating

him, Culla merely looked ahead at O'Sullivan, standing behind a lectern at a corner of the jury box, and avoided the glances of his alleged former accomplices.

And when Culla testified that he had placed the money won from the fixed races at Pocono on a table in Winter's Marshall Motors in Somerville, Winter again briskly shook his head from side to side and loudly uttered, "Jesus Christ." Again, Culla looked straight ahead.

Culla is an acknowledged witness. A big, man, 6-foot-four and about 300 pounds, Culla strangely presented a studied appearance behind his tinted wire-rimmed glasses, double-breasted blue sports coat, blue shirt and print tie. He talked slowly, softly and articulately in a deep voice and when the 12 lawyers objected, as they often did yesterday, he never became roused.

After spending three weeks delivering damaging testimony against jockeys and trainers in a New Jersey courtroom last fall, Culla walked off the witness stand, turned to the defendants and said, "Good luck boys. I hope you walk."

The incident is typical of Culla.

Culla, 35, was facing long prison sentences in Rhode Island and New Jersey in 1977 when he decided to become a government witness and talk about his career of traveling to tracks throughout the East and bribing jockeys and trainers to fix races.

When he decided to talk, Culla became part of the federal witness protection program. He was given a new identity, relocated and paid \$800 a month by the government.

One of the things that has made Culla a particularly valuable witness is that for years he has been squelching away records that he says document his operations. He is used to testifying. He was the government's chief witness in race-fix trials last year in New Jersey and Michigan and his story is the same here as there. Fixing races is easy.

Other than Pellet, the others accepted his offers willingly, according to Culla's testimony. The only question was the price.

Culla testified that Owen had told him prior to the race on March 20 that jockey "Jimmy Allen wanted \$300 to hold his horse. I said that was too much and I told Owen to bring Allen to me. I also asked him to bring (jockey) Ramon DeOliveria to me."

"Allen arrived first" at the meeting at the Magic Chef Restaurant in North Providence, Culla said. "I asked Mr. Allen why he wanted so much money to hold his horse."

"He told me that his horse would be fairly short-strided and it would be hard to hold him," testified Culla. "Plus he was fairly friendly with the trainer. I gave him \$300."

Next came DeOliveria. "I asked him if he would be receptive to holding his horse," said Culla. "He told me he wanted \$300. I told him I'd give him \$300 up front and \$300 after he held the horse."

Next came trainer Harry Hoffman, Culla testified. "I asked him if he had a good relationship with (jockey) Frank) Cornelli. Mr. Hoffman said, 'Yes. I asked Mr. Hoffman what kind of money he wanted. I paid Mr. Hoffman \$1000 and I told him to make sure there were no mistakes. Mr. Hoffman said he would emphasize the importance of this horse not being on the board to Mr. Cornelli."

But in this race, as in several other races, according to testimony, Culla was part of a Gang that Culla's Fix Straight. After the race, he said, he was told there was almost a riot at the track "because DeOliveria had to literally stand up on the horse from the 70-yard pole to the finish." But they cleared \$55,000, Culla said.

At Pocono, Culla testified, jockey Vernon Gallup was paid \$300 to fix a race but finished second when he should have been off the board. "I told Mr. Winter there was a problem," said Culla.

"Winter said he hoped we'd straighten this out."

How?

Winter ordered Culla, according to the testimony to take some men and have the jockey beaten.

So the men did, Culla said, and "they beat and kicked him until he was unconscious, breaking his ribs."



WORCESTER STRIKE — Striking employees of Worcester City Hospital cheer after other municipal workers refused to cross picket line yesterday. Across town, some 24 city employees were arrested during a demonstration at the entrance to the Worcester city dump. The arrests came as a Superior Court judge granted a request by the state's Labor Relations Commission and issued a temporary restraining order against the strikers. The walkout began earlier this week. (AP photo)

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Several of the 20 races Culla allegedly fixed at a half-dozen East Coast tracks in 1974 and 1975 did not go under the witness stand.

Jockey Ramon DeOliveria had agreed to hold back his horse for \$1000 in the ninth race at Lincoln Downs March 20, 1975, but, according to the witness, the horse had other ideas. Culla said DeOliveria "had to literally stand up on the horse from the 70-yard pole to the finish" to keep the animal from winning.

There was a disturbance after the race, DeOliveria

was suspended and law enforcement officials tried to interview him, Culla said.

At Owen's suggestion, Culla said, he gave DeOliveria another \$1000 and sent him to Springfield, where Owen said "two bookies he knew would hide him out until the heat blew over."

Under questioning by Jeremiah O'Sullivan of the Justice Department, Culla said another race he fixed, the fourth at Pocono Downs on Aug. 20, 1974, was so obvious that spectators nearly rioted. Fines were started in the stands in protest, he said.

Culla will return to the witness stand today for his fifth day of testimony. He is expected to be on the stand several weeks. Judge A. David Mazzone is presiding.

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