

TAMPERING CLOUD OVER WRESTLING BIG'S TRIAL

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By JACK NEWFIELD and PHIL MUSHNICK

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Federal prosecutors are probing whether a TV producer tampered with witnesses and obstructed justice in a case in which his lawyer-wife represented a top wrestling promoter, The Post has learned.

The Brooklyn-based investigation focuses on TV producer Martin Bergman and his wife, Laura Brevetti, a former prosecutor who has handled several high-profile cases as a defense lawyer, federal sources told The Post.

The probe stems from the trial of Vince McMahon, the World Wrestling Federation czar who was acquitted last year of distributing steroids and encouraging their use among his wrestlers, including Hulk Hogan.

Brevetti was McMahon's lawyer.

Two FBI agents, working with Assistant U.S. Attorney Jonathan Sack, have been interviewing witnesses about Bergman's conduct leading up to the trial, sources said.

Investigators are trying to determine if Bergman pursued witnesses and potential witnesses against McMahon in an effort to change, taint or discredit their testimony by inducing them to accept "TV consultant" money, sources said.

Bergman contacted witnesses, their lawyers and journalists seeking information and access to McMahon's accusers, ostensibly to produce a TV piece on the trial, sources said.

He alternately represented himself as a producer for "60 Minutes," "Hard Copy," "A Current Affair" and "American Journal" – without disclosing that he lived with Brevetti and was working out of her office.

Bergman offered one key witness between \$250,000 and \$400,000, sources and government documents state.

The sources also said the witness, McMahon's top deputy Emily Feinberg, told investigators of Bergman's offer and testified that she purchased and distributed steroids at McMahon's behest.

Feinberg, also known as Emily Arth, posed in Playboy magazine in 1988.

The government also is looking into the role Bergman may have played in preparing false ethics complaints against the lead prosecutor and two investigators in the McMahon case, sources told The Post.

A Post investigation has established that Bergman also was responsible for three articles that smeared the prosecutorial team – one appearing on the eve of the trial.

One was an investigative story in the New York Observer that attacked lead prosecutor Sean O'Shea for sexual misconduct. Sources at the Observer say Bergman timed the piece – picked up by The Post the next day – to appear on the eve of the McMahon trial.

The sources said Bergman also planted two negative stories about federal investigator Anthony Valenti in the Observer at a time when Valenti was known to be preparing an indictment against McMahon.

All the stories were based on complaints later deemed unfounded by the Justice Department, and O'Shea, Valenti and FBI agent Warren Flagg were exonerated.

Federal probes are trying to establish whether there were financial connections among Bergman, McMahon and the lawyers who filed the baseless misconduct complaints, the sources said.

Valerie Capom [spelling unclear in facsimile], chief of the criminal division in the Eastern District, declined comment on the investigation.

Bergman and Brevetti declined, through their lawyer Joel Cohen, to be interviewed.

In a separate statement to The Post, Brevetti said:

“I have been advised of no investigation and have never been contacted by anyone in the government about the existence of one. In any event, there is absolutely no basis for any claim of wrongdoing by me. It's clear to me that this story is being waged by certain individuals within the government who have a personal vendetta against me.”

Joe Conason, the Observer's executive editor, told The Post: “We were used by Bergman. I was upset that he never disclosed his conflict of interest to us. I took his name off the article. I didn't pay him for the article. He never wrote for the Observer again.”

Bergman had sought the assignment based on advance knowledge of the ethics complaint, a source said. Bergman asked O'Shea to respond to the complaint, filed on June 24, 1994, before O'Shea even knew of it. The story ran on June 29, a week before McMahon's trial.

The pattern was repeated with investigator Valenti.

Shaun Assael, whose byline was on the O'Shea article, also feels duped.

"Bergman used me to throw O'Shea off his game, and to help his future wife at the start of the trial. Bergman wasn't honest with me about his tangled web," Assael said. Bergman denied any involvement in the O'Shea story to the FBI. But the agency has a fax stating he was co-writing the story.

Marriage puzzled their pals

By JACK NEWFIELD and PHIL MUSHNICK

They're the latest Odd Couple: Laura Brevetti, the high-profile lawyer with the sparkling track record as a federal prosecutor and defense attorney, last year married longtime beau Martin Bergman, a free-lance TV producer with a reputation for misrepresentation.

As a young prosecutor, Brevetti played hardball with bad guys. In 1981, she played a role in the Abscam convictions.

In 1983, she was named the first female member of the Organized Crime Strike Force. In 1986, she led the prosecution that crippled the hierarchy of the Bonanno crime family and Teamsters Local 814. New York magazine once named her Prosecutor of the Year.

As a defense lawyer in 1992, Brevetti bucked what seemed to be long odds by winning acquittal of Westchester nanny Olivia Riner, accused of murdering the 3-month-old in her charge.

Two years later, Brevetti won the acquittal of World Wrestling Federation boss Vince McMahon, accused of running a steroid ring for his wrestlers.

Brevetti and Bergman were married last year by Mayor Giuliani. Lawyers, prosecutors and friends professed total mystification by the union.

In 1981, Bergman was indicted but cleared of charges of bribery and tampering with public records. He also was an FBI informant in the Suffolk County sewer district scandal, law enforcement sources told The Post.

"A Current Affair" producer John Johnston, who worked on WWF stories, remembers Bergman as someone who "always operated in the shadows."

"He always talked tough like he was going to deliver the goods on the WWF bad guys, but he never delivered," Johnston said. "He was tight with [WWF czar Vince] McMahon

and his [longtime] attorney Jerry McDevitt. He was always leaking conspiracy theories that seemed to be coming directly out of McDevitt's office.”

Several sources said Bergman got Geraldo Rivera's now-defunct TV show “Now It Can Be Told” to do an entire half-hour attacking the motives and integrity of police and prosecutors in the Westchester nanny murder case – around the same time his wife was winning an acquittal for the nanny.

In 1991, Bergman co-produced a “60 Minutes” segment attacking Sen. Alfonse D'Amato using mobster-turned-information Henry Hill, who made charges that seemed irresponsible even to D'Amato's critics. D'Amato demanded that CBS fire Bergman, but Bergman was working free-lance. He has never produced another segment for “60 Minutes.”

In 1991, Joe Conason and Post columnist Jack Newfield met with Bergman while preparing an article on D'Amato for Playboy. Bergman asked for a \$5,000 fee to provide some research. Newfield and Conason said they told Bergman it was unethical to pay for information.

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