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## CRIMINAL JUSTICE

# Miami murder trial has a Tinseltown twist

**■ If the life of ex-FBI agent John Connolly - accused of killing a Miami gambling executive - sounds like something from a Hollywood script, there is a good reason.**

BY DAVID OVALLE  
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On the night of July 31, 1982, the corpse of jai-alai executive John Callahan was found in the trunk of a silver Cadillac parked at Miami International Airport. He had been shot twice in the head.

Theatrically plopped on Callahan's chest: a dime, a criminal underworld warning

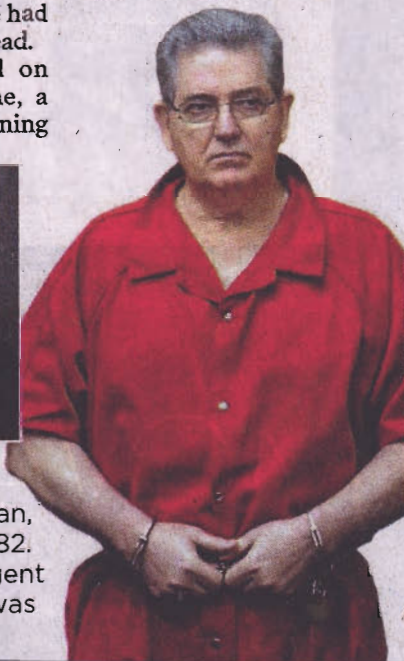
that others had better not "drop a dime," or snitch.

Now, 26 years later, Miami-Dade County prosecutors believe they have enough evidence to convict a disgraced former FBI agent, 68-year-old John J. Connolly, on charges that he helped set up the hit on the jai-alai executive, a beefy, weight-lifting accountant with an alleged case of "gangsteritis" -- mob-

•TURN TO TRIAL, 21A



**SHOT TO DEATH:** Jai-alai executive John Callahan, above, was killed in 1982. In 2006, former FBI agent John Connolly, right, was indicted in the case.





## CRIMINAL JUSTICE

# Former FBI man on trial in a 1982 Miami slaying

\* TRIAL, FROM 1A

ster envy.

Defense attorneys argue that Connolly wasn't in Miami at the time and that prosecutors are relying on remorseless killers to build the case against their client.

Some of the players in this saga provided the inspiration for *The Departed*, Martin Scorsese's acclaimed 2006 film about how the Boston mob infiltrated the FBI as the FBI was infiltrating the mob.

In the movie, Matt Damon plays a Connolly-like character, aiding the gangsters while ostensibly trying to bring them to justice.

As for a motive, prosecutors say that Connolly whispered to Boston mobsters that Callahan was going to "rat" on them about a prior mob-ordered murder.

Opening statements are set to begin Monday in Miami-Dade, where prosecutors hope to land a conviction that could lock Connolly up for life.

He currently is serving 10 years for a 2002 guilty verdict on federal racketeering charges. During that trial, a jury cleared Connolly of a specific count related to Callahan's death.

But in 2006, a Miami-Dade grand jury indicted Connolly on charges of first-degree murder and conspiracy to commit first-degree murder in connection with Callahan's slaying.

Connolly's trial, likely to offer colorful testimony from a pair of aging gangsters, adds another chapter to the dark connections between Winter Hill and the feds — a relationship that has riveted New Englanders and cast a cloud over the bureau.

Boston's Winter Hill Gang was led by James "Whitey" Bulger — who, like Connolly, grew up in the city's Southie neighborhood — and Stephen "The Rifleman" Flemmi. In the movie, Jack Nicholson character plays a Bulger-esque character.

The real-life Bulger vanished in 1995, allegedly after he was tipped off that the feds were going to arrest him.

## CONSOLIDATING POWER

While running their own crime syndicate during the 1970s and '80s, Bulger and Flemmi served as informants on the Italian mob for Connolly, who prosecutors say protected them as they con-



BULGER



FLEMMI



MARTORANO



RICO

solidated their power in Boston.

Connolly, prosecutors maintain, provided them with crucial information about upcoming indictments and on snitches within their organization. And, they allege, he sometimes suggested which snitches they ought to kill.

Although Connolly was not in Miami on the day Callahan's body was discovered, prosecutors say he had earlier provided vital intelligence to the gang that cemented the executive's demise.

Callahan was president of World Jai-Alai, operator of a sporting facility near Miami International Airport. In jai-alai, players catch a rock-hard ball in a hand-shaped basket and fling it around a three-walled court until someone misses or it goes out of bounds. Spectators bet on the action.

The corporation was owned by a group of Boston businessmen, but was allegedly being skimmed of its profits by the mob. Callahan, known to associate with Boston gangsters, was allegedly the conduit.

In the late 1970s, the Bostonians sold the business to Roger Wheeler, a Tulsa millionaire. Apparently, Wheeler didn't like being skimmed, and he tried to put a stop to it.

## ASSIGNED TO KILL

Enter Winter Hill hit man John V. Martorano, known as "the Butcher of Basin Street." According to his sworn statement, he was given the task — in the presence of Bulger and Flemmi — of killing Wheeler.

On May 27, 1981, Wheeler was shot between the eyes at Tulsa's ritzy Southern Hills Country Club after finishing his regular round of golf. The killer: a man wearing a fake beard who carried his .38 in a paper bag.

Through their contacts in the FBI, Bulger and Flemmi learned that Callahan might be getting ready to "rat" on them about Wheeler's killing.

At least that was the testi-

dirty secrets — he never got the chance. His corpse was found in the trunk of his Fleetwood in Parking Lot 3 at MIA.

Martorano, the admitted triggerman, and Flemmi, both of whom pleaded guilty to roles in the murder plot, will be key witnesses against Connolly.

Former FBI agent Paul Rico, who later became a World Jai-Alai security director, was also implicated in Wheeler's slaying, but the

Miami Shores resident died in 2004 while awaiting trial.

Martorano served 12 years in prison for nearly 80 felonies, a fact that is sure to be brought to the attention of jurors by Connolly's defenders.

## CREDIBILITY ISSUE

"They're trying to convict John Connolly of a murder that occurred in Florida while he was in Massachusetts — and they're using serial killers to prove that

case," said defense attorney Manny Casabielle, who along with Bruce Fleisher is defending the ex-agent.

Miami-Dade Assistant State Attorney Michael Von Zamft — who is trying the case with federal prosecutor Fred Wyshak — says Martorano's testimony is straight-forward.

"The man has been on 60 Minutes and has testified in open court here in Florida," Von Zamft said. "There is no credibility issue."