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SOUTH FLORIDA EXTRA

1982 MURDER

FBI agent's trial begins

■ A murder trial got under way in the case of a former FBI agent accused of getting too close to mobsters.

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Disgraced FBI agent John J. Connolly finally faced a jury Monday, three years after his indictment over the 1982 murder of an accountant found rotting in a Cadillac trunk at Miami's airport.

But the story floated Monday in the prosecution's opening statements took broader aim, detailing the darkest scandal in modern Boston law enforcement history:

Connolly, bound by loyalties forged in the neighborhood known as Southie, shielded the city's most notorious gangster, James "Whitey" Bulger, in a far-reaching scandal that roiled the FBI and blurred the line between justice and crime.

"The defendant is a corrupt FBI agent," prosecutor Fred Wyshak told jurors in Judge Stanford Blake's Miami-Dade Circuit Court.

"He gave sensitive information to gangsters who used that information to protect themselves from investigation and prosecution and used that information to kill people — and one of those people was John Callahan."

Connolly rose to FBI stardom in the late 1970s and 1980s by cultivating Bulger and his right-hand man, Stephen "The Rifleman" Flemmi, as informants against Boston's Italian mob. The FBI



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NOTES: Ex-agent John Connolly, center, is flanked by attorneys James McDonald, left, and Bruce Fleisher.

helped dismantle the mob but Bulger's Winter Hill gang flourished in turn.

Connolly, 68, is charged with first-degree murder and conspiracy to commit the first-degree murder of Callahan, who had run Miami's World Jai-Alai.

Authorities say Connolly helped set up Callahan's assassination by tipping off Boston gangsters that the executive might help investigators piecing together the earlier murder of millionaire Roger Wheeler.

A hitman named John V. Martorano shot Wheeler in 1981 at an Oklahoma golf course. Martorano later killed Callahan, prosecutors say, after Connolly tipped off Bulger and Flemmi that the accountant would likely cooperate in the Wheeler probe.

Flemmi and Martorano — both have pleaded guilty in

Callahan's death — are expected to testify.

Connolly defense attorney Manny Casabielle stressed that the Winter Hill gangsters had already figured Callahan would flip. And he stressed Connolly was simply doing his job in the FBI's top echelon informant program that focused on dismantling the mob.

"Guess who was stuck in the middle? The agents that were handling the informants. One of those agents was John Connolly," he said.

In 2002, a federal jury convicted Connolly of racketeering for his role in helping the Winter Hill mob do business. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison.

On Monday, Wyshak offered a detailed rundown of the many characters involved and spoke of the more than \$200,000 in bribes that purportedly went to Connolly.

He also described Connolly's longtime friendship with Bulger's brother, former Massachusetts Senate president William Bulger, who grew up in his neighborhood.

Wyshak, a U.S. attorney trying the case with state prosecutor Michael Von Zamt, insisted Connolly knew harm would come Callahan's way: When the agent tipped off the gang earlier, informants died.

They played in court a *Dateline* NBC clip of a 1999 interview with Connolly.

"I was in the murder and mayhem business. I did my job and I did my job honorably," Connolly said, adding later: "Sure, they were gangsters, but they were our gangsters."

The television shut off. "They were our gangsters," Wyshak repeated. "Sad comment."

For his part, **Casabielle** attacked the credibility of Martorano, Flemmi and associate Kevin Weeks, who among them accounted for 46 murders.

Martorano is free from prison after serving just 12 years for 21 murders. "That's about seven, eight months per body," **Casabielle** said, noting Martorano could face the death penalty in two states if he fails to cooperate.

And the true leader Bulger, he stressed, has remained a high-profile fugitive since 1995.

"You're not going to hear from him, when we can test his credibility," **Casabielle** said.