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Wcpx Presses Its Luck, Gets Interview With McLain

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WCPX-TV (Ch. 6) sportscaster Rod Luck paid a visit to the Seminole County jail last week to interview former major-league star pitcher Denny McLain, who Thursday was sentenced to 23 years in federal prison for racketeering, extortion and drug dealing.

McLain spent six weeks at the Seminole facility awaiting sentencing.

In that time he refused a [great](#) number of interviews, but Luck persuaded him to sit and talk for what WCPX promoted as an "exclusive, intimate conversation" with McLain. The name of the half-hour special that aired last Thursday was Portrait of an American Dream.



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Luck, 36, said he is proud of the show. "Our station is gutsy," he said. "We try things. My bosses, Mike Schweitzer general manager and Tom Hauff news director let me tackle things like this. There's more to our [sports](#) programming than reading scores."

This certainly was proved Thursday night, when WCPX came on the air for its 11 o'clock news with Luck interviewing McLain on a live exclusive from the Seminole jail. Luck asked pertinent questions about the sentencing. McLain: "I'm not pleased at all with my sentence."

"I had to convince McLain we weren't out to do a number on him," Luck said of his initial session with McLain. "We weren't going to do anything to hurt him. He had already hurt himself. Maybe by doing this thing, we could help somebody else. Maybe kids would see where this guy went wrong, and avoid getting themselves messed up.

"He agreed to talk, but we almost got shut out. I got a call from Denny -- they let him make collect calls -- and he said everything was off. He said sheriff John Polk had second thoughts about letting McLain do this thing. I had to track down Polk, convince him what we were doing was [good](#)."

"Well, we got the thing done after all, and Denny answered all my questions. I told him that he was awfully convincing in what he was saying. But that he sure didn't convince the jury.

"The response to the show has been great. People called to say they liked the show. Only complaint we got was from some old lady who was upset that Wheel of Fortune wasn't on that night."

Luck said WCPX gave McLain "a small stipend" for the interview. "Hey, you've got to feel for the guy," Luck said. "You've got to feel for his wife and five kids. I got my heart caught in my throat. The [money](#) was going to be for the guy's wife and kids."

Schweitzer said WCPX paid \$3,500 to McLain's wife, Sharon, for the interview, and agreed to give her a percentage of any fees it might obtain [selling](#) the tapes to other stations. (WXYZ in Detroit paid \$2,000 to use them, and Sharon McLain will get \$500 of it.)

"McLain wouldn't have done this thing without the fee," Schweitzer said. "He wanted some compensation. He wanted it for his [family](#). I don't have trouble with that. If anyone does, they ought to think of themselves in Mrs. McLain's place."

Paying for an interview -- even with a convicted felon -- is not [new](#) in print or broadcast journalism. It's called "checkbook journalism."